

A METHOD FOR METHODISTS:
INCORPORATING CLASSICAL WESLEYAN SPIRITUALITY
FOR CONTEMPORARY PASTORS

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Dedicated to Madeline Brannen
who taught me everything about love for God
and love for education.
I love you, Mom.

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ABSTRACT

United Methodist pastors come into ministry with a fervor for God and love for God's people. The practice of ministry can be all consuming. Pastors need to be vigilant to maintain a lifestyle that is balanced spiritually, physically, emotionally, and relationally. Developing a Rule of Life that includes classical Wesleyan small group support can assist pastors in remaining faithful to God and to healthy practices which will enhance both their personal and ministry satisfaction.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING: SPIRITUAL HEALTH OF NORTHERN MAINE UNITED METHODIST PASTORS

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

—Colossians 1:9-10¹

Introduction

As a United Methodist pastor, serving the New England Conference, my ordination vows affirmed my understanding that I would freely go wherever God and my Bishop sent me. Our historical forebears taught us well how to be circuit riders; going from community to community spreading the gospel, inspiring the laity to minister to their communities in the name of Christ. Yet, within our conference boundaries, all six New England states, most pastors hope and pray that they will be called to the southern parts of our conference. My current call as district Superintendent to the Northern Maine district has stretched my understanding of both my original call to the local parish and my preference to be located nearer my family in Southern New Hampshire. I have found that God does indeed work in mysterious ways; I now have a new and profound love for Northern Maine and its people. I also now bear a sacred burden to serve and equip the pastors in this district to be as healthy and effective as they can be in their life and in ministry.

¹ All Scripture citations are taken from the New International Version of The Holy Bible unless otherwise noted.

Indeed, I have found the people of this district to be faithful and dedicated to their God and to our church despite challenges that are both common to all mainline churches today and unique to us in this most Northeastern part of the United States. I have a deep respect for both the laity of our church, who are tenacious and steadfast, and the pastors who have said yes to this call to serve God and their communities despite our shrinking economies, an aging population, isolated geography, and increasingly secular neighbors.

Reverend Margaret Marcuson rightly asserts, in her book *Leaders Who Last*, “We cannot lead others further than we are willing to go ourselves. If we want people to go deeper in the spiritual life, if we want them to grow up emotionally, if we want them to be more authentic, we have to show the way.”² Healthy pastors are necessary for the church to make healthy disciples. And yet, pastors are real people with real life stressors as well as the additional strains that a pastoral vocation appends.

In a 2013 study of pastor wellness, Professor Matt Bloom of the University of Notre Dame found that the pastors studied reported a moderately high level of job burnout which included physical and emotional exhaustion, difficulty in decision making, lack of creativity, and reduced job effectiveness. Factors that influenced these findings were the amount of time spent on self-care, meditation, and prayer, and significant relationships both inside and outside of church.³ The pastors of the United Methodist Church in the Northern Maine district are not immune to the burnout and other social ills that the studied pastors related. Our churches are not immune to current societal ills either

² Margaret Marcuson, *Leaders Who Last: Sustaining Yourself And Your Ministry* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2009), 5.

³ Matthew Bloom, “Flourishing in Ministry: Emerging Research Insights on the Well-Being of Pastors” (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business, 2013), accessed February 13, 2018, https://wellbeing.nd.edu/assets/198819/emerging_insights_2_1_.pdf, 16.

and if our churches are to flourish, our pastors must be in good spiritual and physical health.

History of the United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 when The Evangelical United Brethren and The Methodist Church united. Each of these churches had a common vision and a common tradition dating back over two hundred years. The Wesleyan movement was founded in the 1730s by John and Charles Wesley; two Anglican priests who felt called to “reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”⁴ They began their movement in England and in the American colonies at the same time as Philip William Otterbein and Martin Boehm were developing the United Brethren in Christ and Jacob Albright was forming The Evangelical Association. Each of these principals participated in similar ministries and conferences but were unable to agree to merge at this early stage. It was not until over two hundred years later that the merger actually came to fruition when all the individual denominations sought a united world denomination that would address the issues of the day – political unrest, racism, and economic disparity – through the God they all served and the values they all shared.⁵

Today the world-wide denomination is comprised of 12.6 million members who have a common set of distinctives. The church is connectional, grounded in scripture, inclusive, Wesleyan, and ecumenical, with a social justice and missional orientation.⁶

⁴ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 12.

⁵ *The Book of Discipline*, 13.

⁶ The United Methodist Church (UMC), “Who We Are,” accessed December 17, 2018, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are>.

United Methodist Distinctions

Currently, the United Methodist Church is the second largest Protestant denomination in the world. Its members can be found in the United States, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Over the years, the church has grown and split. At present, there are over 80 million Methodists worldwide that share a common history and tradition but are now comprised of many smaller Wesleyan denominations. Churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of the Nazarene, The Salvation Army, The Free Methodist Church, and the Wesleyan Church all came from Wesleyan origins. While the United Methodist Church maintains some affiliation with all of these other Wesleyan denominations, they are not included within the denomination itself and therefore have a unique governance and structure.⁷

The United Methodist Church is grounded in Scripture as its first and most important distinctive. The United Methodist Constitution states, “The church is a community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ.”⁸ *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* goes on to say, “United Methodists profess the historic Christian faith in God incarnate in Jesus Christ for our salvation and ever at work in human history in the Holy Spirit.”⁹ United Methodist practice is informed by Christian tradition, “enlivened in experience and tested by reason,” but is first and foremost grounded in Scripture.¹⁰

⁷ UMC, “Who We Are.”

⁸ *The Book of Discipline*, 25.

⁹ *The Book of Discipline*, 47.

¹⁰ *The Book of Discipline*, 47.

The United Methodist church has been formed with the Wesleyan emphasis on grace. United Methodists understand God's gift of grace to be within us even before we are aware of it and shapes us through our conversion and sanctification experiences.

The United Methodist church upholds that our faith must be met with action. Faith and good works go hand in hand. Wesley taught that our faith could not be solitary; we are all encompassed within a social environment and it is the mission of the church to reach out in mission and ministry to all the world. Working for peace and justice is part of the DNA of the Methodist movement.

State of the United Methodist Church

One of the distinctive characteristics of John Wesley's original Methodist movement was the emphasis he placed on the spiritual formation of its members. Wesley believed that the spiritual life would not bear fruit if it was stagnant. To that end, he organized Methodist members into small groups where leaders would help the members honestly discuss the state of their soul, receive encouragement and correction, and account for how they were serving the needy. This group spiritual formation was led by mature Christian pastors and leaders who also accounted for their spiritual life in gatherings that Wesley called Christian Conferencing. The movement took off and we see the fruit of that movement in a worldwide denomination of over twelve million members today.

Unfortunately, currently, the United Methodist Church is not growing overall and certainly not in the United States. In New England, the United Methodist church lost 3.5% of its members between 2015 and 2016. It saw a 4% loss in worship attendance in

that same period of time.¹¹

The Northern Maine district of the New England Conference's membership includes 6,573 individuals which is a loss of 1.2% of its members over the year referenced above. While 22 of its 59 churches have seen an increase in worship attendance over the past year, ten have remained stagnant and 27 churches have seen a decline in this area.¹² The decline in the number of members and the decline in the number of worshippers in weekly services is an alarming trend that likely indicates that its members' spiritual health is declining as well.

Northern Maine Demographics

The United Methodist Church has over twelve million members worldwide. Over seven million of those members reside within the United States and are organized into administrative areas called Conferences. There are 56 Conferences within the United States and each Conference is further divided into smaller regions called districts.¹³ The Northern Maine district is the largest geographical district east of the Mississippi. It is comprised of seven Maine counties; Aroostook, Waldo, Penobscot, Washington, Hancock, Piscataquis, and Somerset; totaling 37,870 square miles and 350,889 people.¹⁴ This part of Maine is largely forested, rugged in its geography, and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and Canada. The largest city within the region is Bangor with just over

¹¹ The New England Conference of the United Methodist Church (NEUMC), *Official Journal*, 2017, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://neumc-email.brtapp.com/files/fileshare/2017+journal+and+directory+pdfs/2017+journal+complete+9-11-17.pdf>, 479-483.

¹² NEUMC, *Official Journal*, 479-483.

¹³ General Council on Finance and Administration, "Data Services," The United Methodist Church, October 12, 2012, accessed February 04, 2018, <http://www.gcfa.org/services/data-services/>.

¹⁴ MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

31,000 residents. The next largest cities are Presque Isle in Aroostook County with only 9,300 residents and Ellsworth, Down East, with a population of 7,800.¹⁵ Most of this region is comprised of small rural communities. In the most northern and western ends, there are areas that are small enough not to have an official name or incorporation but instead are under the jurisdiction of the state for all matters of governance. These areas are populated by under 100 residents in each community.

Demographic statistics gathered from MissionInsite indicate that out of the 350,889 residents, 61% are over the age of 35. In fact, the average age is over 44 and this trend is continuing to increase. The population is fairly stable and as the younger residents leave home, at age eighteen, they are not continuing to stay in the area. Ten-year projections indicate that by the year 2026, the fastest growing demographic will be in the 60 and older age group. Every other group is expected to decline in numbers. In fact, the total population of this district is expected to decline over the next ten years with no expected growth in the foreseeable future.¹⁶

The population of the district is currently comprised of a fairly equal number of men and women with over 53% married and living in single family homes. Educationally, the largest group of residents have a high school diploma or less and make less than \$75,000 per household. This area of the country has over 11% living below the national poverty line.¹⁷ In fact, two of its counties, Washington and Hancock, are the

¹⁵ “Demographic Statistics: Maine,” Infoplease, 2000, accessed February 13, 2018, www.infoplease.com/us/census/data/maine/demographic.html.

¹⁶ MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

¹⁷ MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

poorest in the state with over 20% of the population living under the poverty line and an unemployment rate of close to 12%.¹⁸

Northern Maine is largely populated by persons of European descent. Ninety-five percent of the residents are in this category with a steady 3% of the population of Native American heritage. Northern Maine is home to five Native American tribes; the Micmac, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy of Indian Township, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy of Pleasant Point. The largest growing population is Hispanic as more and more migrant workers come to harvest potato and blueberry crops and stay to work in the Christmas wreath industry.¹⁹

Every area of the country has a particular personality that can be derived from its geographical, political, historical, and social constructs. Northern Maine has four distinct areas with four distinct personalities. The most Northern region, Aroostook County, is a farming community. It is the furthest north and is in a snow belt. Folks in the “county,” as it is known, are friendly and outgoing. They have learned to lean on each other in the long harsh winters. This area of Northern Maine is a mini “Bible belt” with many small, conservative, independent Baptist churches in residence. The “county” also has a growing Amish and Mennonite population.²⁰

In comparison, Down East folk are more independent and less likely to associate with strangers. One Down Easter reported that they consider themselves “clannish.”²¹ The major occupation is fishing and lobstering. This is an area of the state with the least

¹⁸ “Demographic Statistics: Maine.”

¹⁹ MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

²⁰ MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

²¹ Pastoral conversation with parishioner, November 2016.

professing church attendees and the most severe poverty. This area of Maine has few services or infrastructure available to its residents. It has one of the most severe opioid issues in the country. With lack of economic possibilities, a harsh geographical environment, a growing drug problem, and few young residents, this area of Maine is depressed economically, emotionally, and spiritually.²²

The greater Bangor area is a small but bustling metropolis. It is home to three major colleges and universities. Within Maine, its public-school system is rated among the top ten. The city is host to the largest hospital system in the region and has a police department that is known for its community involvement. The local clergy/laity are actively involved in street ministry (Street Pastors) to the poor and homeless population. Within the region, Bangor has the most diversity with three Jewish congregations, one Islamic center, and churches of every denomination. While the population is 94% Caucasian, the city's population includes African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Hispanics.²³

The last unique area of the region is the "Highlands" which is the most Western part of the district. This area once had a vibrant and growing population with busy paper mills and railroad connections. Almost all of the mills have now closed, and the area is very depressed economically. The area is quite rural with year-round sports such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, skiing, and water sports bringing in tourists as a major source of income. The towns grow in numbers in the summer season and are quite reduced in the harsh winter months.²⁴

²² MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

²³ "Demographic Statistics: Maine."

²⁴ MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

In summary, the residents of Northern Maine tend to be older than the national average, less wealthy, less educated, and primarily of European ancestry. The population is declining, with retirees the fastest growing group. Economics and job loss from closing paper mills have resulted in younger families moving out of the area to find work. Northern Maine is rural in nature with agriculture, fishing, health care, and education as the top vocational choices for most of its residents. Declining health due to aging, drug and alcohol addictions, and mental health issues are some of the major psycho/social issues of the region.

The United Methodist Church in Northern Maine

The Northern Maine district of the United Methodist Church is comprised of 59 individual churches. Membership within these churches run from a low of twelve to a high of 660.²⁵ However, membership numbers are not a good indicator of church size for several reasons. Membership lists are not always kept up to date. While churches are encouraged to conduct a membership audit at least every ten years, this does not always happen. Even for churches who do have an accurate accounting of who belongs on their membership list, this accounting does not indicate who may be active and who is not. It also does not include the list of constituents who are very active and yet have not declared a formal relationship to the church. Each church community has a unique culture. Some churches are very traditional and encourage formal membership and in fact, make this relationship quite easy to obtain. Other churches are more fluid and are not as tied to a formal relationship. Some churches may be very taxing about how membership is obtained and therefore have a more active constituent population.

²⁵ NEUMC, *Official Journal*, 479-483.

Given these factors a more accurate number to understand church size may be found by looking at weekly attendance. Of the 59 UMC churches within Northern Maine, 20 have a weekly attendance of fewer than 20. Twenty-seven churches have a weekly attendance of 50 or less. Nine churches have between 50 and 100 in weekly attendance, and three have between 100 and 150.²⁶

The size of the churches can be further understood within the context of the communities in which they reside. The largest church within the district is Bangor First. Bangor First has a weekly attendance average of 112. It has over 600 professing members most of whom are inactive at this time.²⁷ Bangor, as previously mentioned, is a community of 31,000 residents. Bangor is home to hundreds of churches of all denominations with the largest being the Roman Catholic Church. There are two United Methodist Churches within four miles of each other. In fact, there are nine United Methodist related churches within this geographical area.²⁸

The next two largest UMC churches, Grant Memorial UMC in Presque Isle and Grey Memorial UMC in Caribou, are both in Aroostook County. In fact, they are only twelve miles apart. Both of these churches are in communities that have populations of 9,300 and 7,800 respectively. These communities have an abundance of small churches of various denominations. Presque Isle is home to the University of Maine, Husson University, and Northern Maine Community College, and is the economic center of the county.²⁹

²⁶ NEUMC, *Official Journal*, 479-483.

²⁷ NEUMC, *Official Journal*, 479-483.

²⁸ MissionInsite report, Appendix A.

²⁹ “Demographic Statistics: Maine.”

On the other end of the spectrum, Vanceboro UMC, one of the smallest churches in the district with a worshipping attendance of eight per week, resides within a town of 100. It is on the Canadian border and has only eight children. The town has had to close their school and bus their eight students an hour and a half to the nearest community with a school. There is no infrastructure in this area of Maine. The nearest hospital or social service agency is almost an hour away.³⁰

Most of the churches reside in small towns with populations of 1,000 to 3,000 and most are in fairly remote rural areas. The distances between communities and churches are greatly enhanced during the winter months when travel conditions do not allow for easy access.

Another way to view church size can be surmised by the amount of professional clergy leadership a church pays for. Of the 59 United Methodist Churches within the Northern Maine district, six have full-time clergy leadership, three churches pay for three-quarter clergy support, 15 pay for half-time clergy leadership, 26 pay for one-quarter clergy support, and nine pay for less than one-eighth of a clergy appointment, which is basically a Sunday morning preacher.³¹

One other factor that may determine church size and viability that is increasingly seen throughout this area of the country and perhaps all over the United States, is the number of people who participate in some part of church life though they have not declared a formal relationship. Within the small communities in Northern Maine, many residents consider the local United Methodist church to be “their” church. They attend church suppers, concerts, occasional services, and may even help a particular fundraising

³⁰ “Demographic Statistics: Maine.”

³¹ NEUMC, *Official Journal*, 479-483.

activity, and yet they are not weekly or monthly attenders and cannot be found on any membership role. At particular moments in their lives, such as the birth or death of family members, these folks call on the local church to be their spiritual guide. Unfortunately, there is no statistical data to better understand how pervasive this is within these local communities.

Northern Maine United Methodist Church Pastors

Within the United Methodist system, there are several pathways to clerical ministry for the purposes of leading a local parish. The most traditional pathway is through ordination. The United Methodist church ordains elders and deacons. Elders are called upon to lead the church “in preaching and teaching the Word of God, administration of the sacraments, ordering the Church for its mission and service, and administration of the discipline of the Church.”³² Elders within the church have gone through rigorous educational and credentialing requirements taking a minimum of five years before they are considered for ordination. Most elders are seminary educated within one of the thirteen approved United Methodist Seminaries.

While ordained deacons have a call to “service, word, compassion and justice”³³ and a supporting role within the local church in most instances, ordained deacons may also be called upon, in unique situations, to serve as a pastor of a local congregation. Deacons have a similar education and credentialing process as elders for their ordination requirements.

³² *The Book of Discipline*, 218.

³³ *The Book of Discipline*, 262.

An additional pathway to pastoral leadership within the United Methodist Church is through licensing as a local pastor. Local pastors may or may not have seminary education. For those who do not, there is a requirement for participation and completion in a United Methodist Course of Study as well as a series of examinations and other requirements before a license is earned. While elders within the church are required to be itinerant, local pastors are able to remain in their general location, though not in any particular church. Local pastors are only able to officiate at the sacraments within their local appointments and are not guaranteed an appointment as elders are.

The United Methodist Book of Discipline also recognizes that, “In order to enhance the quality of ministry to small membership churches, expand team ministry in churches and in deference to an expression of gifts and evidence of God’s grace associated with the lay ministry of early Methodist, the certified lay minister is to be recognized and utilized.”³⁴ A certified lay minister, CLM, also has a series of requirements to complete before such a designation is conferred including educational course work. A CLM must work under the care of a licensed or ordained pastor. The certified lay minister is unable to administer the sacraments and is reliant upon a clergy member for that ministry.

Lastly, a United Methodist district superintendent is able to appoint a person he or she feels has the gifts and graces to lead a local church as a supply pastor for the period of one year while that person pursues one of the appropriate clerical pathways.

Currently within Northern Maine, the Bishop has appointed ten ordained elders, one ordained deacon, six retired ordained elders, twenty licensed local pastors, four certified lay ministers, and six supply pastors to serve the churches in the role of pastor.

³⁴ *The Book of Discipline*, 214.

Seven of the nine ordained elders are serving at full-time capacity; some have multiple churches that make up that charge. All six of the retired elders are serving half-time or less. There are no full-time elders in the Down East area of the district and only one in the Highlands. Four of the retired elders are serving the Down East churches. Over half of the pastors who are serving are not ordained ministers and ten of those serving are lay folk.³⁵

Pastoral Health

A call to serve our Lord, Jesus, within His church, as pastor, is a humbling and profound experience. One does not enter into such a position without noticing the heavy mantle that has been conferred. The United Methodist Church has a thorough process for called individuals to be trained and mentored in the hope that these individuals will receive all the support they need to fulfill their calling with grace. Within the United Methodist Church, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is charged with overseeing many levels of support that pastors may require. Each Conference and each district has added roles and responsibilities toward the training, credentialing and support of the pastors who are called into service.

While the United Methodist Church does much to support the pastors in their development and deployment, pastoral ministry remains a challenging and demanding vocation. In a study of clergy mental health, University of North Carolina Professor Dennis Orthner found that the average United Methodist pastor works 56.2 hours per week. These pastors spend an average of 12 evenings a month away from home on

³⁵ NEUMC, *Official Journal*, 479-483.

church business.³⁶ The study also found that though many clergy are well educated, they rank 325th of 432 occupations in remuneration. Flannelly, Stapleton, Larson, Weaver, and Koenig found that Protestant clergy had a high level of job-related stress with a low level of personal resources to cope with those stressors. The demands of the profession often drain pastors in their ability to meet their own marriage and family needs. For clergy in denominations such as the United Methodist Church, who have an itinerant system, the stress of frequent moving adds additional layers of stress and family concerns.³⁷ While healthy families develop social support systems in the community, this is not always possible for clergy families who move frequently and have high role expectations upon them from the church and community. Frequently, clergy and their families feel isolated and lonely.

One would imagine that the stressors that clergy face vocationally have some resulting consequences upon their emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Wespeth, the United Methodist agency responsible for Clergy health and benefits, reported in their 2015 survey of active clergy within the United States that 42% were obese, 49% had high cholesterol currently or previously, 35% had high blood pressure currently or previously, and 12% had diabetes. Seven percent of the clergy surveyed indicated they were depressed to the point of having difficulty working or getting along with others. All of these figures were higher than the average within the demographic population.³⁸

³⁶ Kevin J. Flannelly, David B. Larson, Harold G. Koenig, Andrew J. Weaver, and Carolyn Stapleton, "Mental Health Issues Among Clergy and Other Religious Professionals: A Review of Research," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, December 1, 2002, accessed December 17, 2018, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/154230500205600408>, 394.

³⁷ Kevin J. Flannelly, et al., "Mental Health Issues," 400.

³⁸ Wespeth Center for Health, "2017 Report: Clergy Well-Being Survey," accessed February 13, 2018, <https://www.wespeth.org/assets/1/7/5058.pdf>, 3-5.

Wespath reported that male clergy had higher rates of heart disease and diabetes and were more likely to have lower spiritual health. Female clergy had higher incidents of asthma and were more likely to have occupational stress. While older clergy had more physical health issues, younger clergy had higher incidents of depression. Full-time clergy had more risk of spiritual health issues while part-time clergy had more physical health concerns. Clergy at larger churches had more spiritual and stress concerns while those in smaller churches tended to have more physical health issues.³⁹

Northern Maine UMC Clergy Health Factors

As previously reported, the United Methodist clergy within the Northern Maine district are predominantly over the age of 50, with all the health risks that come from aging. These clergy persons live in isolated rural areas with few resources for community building and collegial support groups. These clergy members have demanding positions where much is expected from them and they tend to be persons who give all they have to their communities of faith. Most of these clergy persons work long hours and are paid less than their peers in other parts of the Conference. Vocational stress is a daily factor in their lives. As pastors, they are not immune to the physical, emotional, and spiritual disease that they strive to liberate their congregants from. In fact, with all of the risk factors mentioned above, clergy burnout, failing physical and emotional health, family discord, and misconduct are all possible consequences if clergy are not diligent in engaging in a balanced, God-focused lifestyle.

³⁹ Wespath, “2017 Report,” 10-12.

Research Assumption

As a district superintendent to Northern Maine, I am responsible for assessing the skills and abilities of the pastors I supervise. I am required to assess the effectiveness of each clergy within the church settings that they find themselves in and make judgments as to the best way to equip, support, and employ these clergy persons. As a systems thinker, I am convinced that healthy clergy are more adept at leading healthy churches and that healthy churches are more apt to grow and flourish. This leads me to wonder how to assess and support the Northern Maine clergy so that they may grow in their spiritual, physical, and emotional health.

Wesleyan Heritage

United Methodists have a rich heritage for overseeing the spiritual growth of their members. Of course, it begins with the Biblical model which can be seen in the Acts 2 church.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.⁴⁰

To this day, we hold up this model as the way to structure our church life together as can be seen in our 2017 New England church conference guide and liturgy used here in Northern Maine and all of New England.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Acts 2:38-39.

⁴¹ NEUMC, "Vital Conversations: Holy Conferencing in Our Churches," accessed December 17, 2018, <https://neumc-www.brtssite.com/files/districts/mme+district/vital+conversations+cc+'17.pdf>.

John Wesley was inspired to institute a disciple-making process which is still one of the best models that can be found. Wesley believed that soul care and spiritual direction were central to an individual's ability to grow as a disciple and essential to leading a church. His rule of life for the church was to gather members into a series of small groups – classes, bands, and select societies – which met to fortify, support, and hold accountable each of its members. Wesley ordered his groups of twelve members around weekly meetings where the members would pray, read scripture, ascertain the state of each member's soul, encourage growth, and direct social mission engagement. In *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, Paul Jones asserts that Wesley was amazed at the spiritual fruit he witnessed in those he organized. Jones writes of Wesley, "When persons begin to bear one another's burdens, they come quite naturally to care for each other. To make this dynamic self-conscious, he declared that class members were to watch over each other's souls, bearing one another's burdens."⁴² Jones asserts that the early Methodist pastors were particularly required to grow in grace and to order their lives around Wesley's method. Wesley believed that these early Methodist societies would not flourish if their leaders were not properly attending to their spiritual care. Jones writes, "The working assumption was that in conferencing with one another's peers, pastors would receive the spiritual direction of supportive accountability without which they could not, in turn, be spiritual directors for their congregations. The whole reason for the church's being then centered on spiritual direction."⁴³ Wesley codified his Rule for Methodist Pastors in these early years in his 12 Rules for Preachers. The rules were as follows:

1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly unemployed. Never while away time, nor spend more time at any place than is strictly necessary.

⁴² W. Paul Jones, *The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002), 87.

⁴³ W. Paul Jones, *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, 89.

2. Be serious.... Avoid all lightness, jesting, and foolish talking.
 3. Converse sparingly and cautiously with women, particularly with young women.
 4. Take no step toward marriage without first consulting with your brethren.
 5. Believe evil of no one unless fully proved...Put the best construction on everything. You know the judge is always supposed to be on the prisoner's side.
 6. Speak evil of no one.
 7. Tell everyone what you think wrong in him, lovingly and plainly, and as soon as may be. Else it will fester in your heart.
 8. Do not affect the gentleman. A preacher of the gospel is the servant of all.
 9. Be ashamed of nothing but sin.
 10. Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time.
 11. You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that need you, but to those that need you most...Build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.
 12. Act in all things, not according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel, and in union with your brethren. As such, it is your part to employ your time as our rules direct; partly in preaching and visiting from house to house; partly in reading, meditation, and prayer.
- Above all, do that part of the work which the Conference shall advise, at those times and places which they shall judge most for His glory.⁴⁴

Classical Rules of Life

Wesley was not, of course, the first to form methodical rules for spiritual formation. In the sixth century, Benedict of Nursia established a Rule of Life for those who were interested in following Jesus with purpose and stability. "Benedict called his Rule "a little rule for beginners."⁴⁵ Since the Rule was first introduced, millions of religious and lay persons have used it to pursue a more focused path in following Christ. While the Rule was instituted for those who would live in monastic communities, much of the spirit of the Rule can be helpful to today's Christian who lives in the world and yet longs for a better way. Macchia writes, "A rule of life allows us to clarify our deepest

⁴⁴ Email to author from Dave Currie, March 13, 2019.

⁴⁵ Timothy Fry, ed., *The Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 11.

values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment.”⁴⁶

One Methodist who lives by a Rule today is Elaine Heath, Dean of Duke Divinity School. She writes in her book *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, “Ordinary Christians are meant to live a radical life of discipleship that involves not just what we believe intellectually, but how we practice prayer, hospitality, and justice.”⁴⁷ She goes on to write, “Having the Rule, using it, and being accountable is one of the surest ways to move deeper into genuine discipleship.”⁴⁸

Research Question

Given the nature of clergy life today for United Methodist pastors in Northern Maine, the current state of the church, and the fertile Wesleyan ground that the United Methodist church stands upon, I propose to study the following question: Will Northern Maine United Methodist pastors grow in their spiritual health when developing and living out a Rule of Life that includes consistent Wesleyan small group support and accountability?

Proposed Project

Given the preponderance of evidence, I believe that engaging in a holistic rule of life that includes consistent spiritual practices and meaningful engagement and

⁴⁶ Stephen A Macchia, *Crafting a Rule Of Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 14.

⁴⁷ Elaine A. Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 69.

⁴⁸ Elaine A. Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, 69.

accountability with others within the faith community will result in healthier and happier clergy. I further assert that spiritually vibrant clergy lead spiritually healthy churches.

In this project, I will host a spiritual retreat for clergy where they will worship, reflect, and be taught the rudiments of developing a Rule of Life based on a model found in Stephen Macchia's book, *Crafting a Rule of Life*. Following this retreat, clergy will be invited to take part in four weeks of small group meetings where they will be supported and held accountable by group members for their experience in living out the Rule they devise. These small group gatherings will follow a classic Wesleyan structure of prayer, discussing the state of each member's soul, accounting for the practices each has engaged in and goal setting for further growth each week. At the end of the four weeks, each member will be invited to continue to follow the Rule he or she has devised and to meet with small groups of interested clergy.

Research Methodology

In order to obtain data in discerning the efficacy of this project, I will prepare a survey for each participant to take both before the retreat and at the end of the four weeks of small group meetings. Questions regarding spiritual practices and the state of current health will be asked on the survey. These results will then be compared to see if any change has occurred. The survey will have both qualitative and quantitative questions for consideration. In addition, I will be leading the small group meetings each week and will be gathering data from the participants as to how the new information is affecting the state of their spiritual health and general satisfaction with their lives.

Limitations

Given the nature of human ability to change, a study of four weeks can only catch the first stages of how change may be enacted. It would take a longitudinal study to see long-term results and the nuances that change may bring. Four weeks is likely too short a time period to see how personal change may affect a clergy person's long-term spiritual health and the ways improving spiritual health impacts those close to the clergy person and within the churches the clergy serves.

In addition, while the survey results will be anonymous, and therefore encouraging of honest feedback, if the group process is to be effective it takes a certain amount of transparency and willingness to be vulnerable to the others in the group. While some participants will find this easy to achieve, group trust is often built over time and four weeks is not an inordinate amount of time for this to occur. While the groups are set up to be confidential in nature, some participants may not be able or willing to be as open as encouraged. Lastly, some clergy may not be willing to be as honest about the state of their lives with their district superintendent as a group leader.

Prayer Intention

It is my prayer that participating in developing a Rule of Life which incorporates Wesleyan small group process will enhance the lives of the participating clergy within the Northern Maine district. Further, I pray that this project will serve as a seed planted within the district and that those who participate will go forward and encourage other clergy, and indeed parishioners, to experience the same. While not all clergy will choose to take part in this project, I pray that there will be a second tier of clergy who will take part in a similar process at a later point in the year so that all Northern Maine clergy will eventually have a Rule of Life and spiritual group present in their lives.

Thesis Overview

Chapter Two

In chapter two of this thesis, I will outline the specific biblical and theological framework that inspires this work. I will parse out biblical constructs, classical theological influences, and specifically Wesleyan theology that informs my understanding. My understanding of spiritual theology is based on my assumption that God is love and that God loves us particularly. In 1 John 4:8 the writer assures us, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Specifically, I am a Methodist and understand my theology based on a Wesleyan perspective. It is not enough to accept the personal saving love of Christ in one’s life, for there can be no holiness without social holiness. Wesleyan theology cannot be complete without an emphasis on sanctification as well. Chapter Two will develop these themes more fully.

Chapter Three

There are many who have come before me who inspire further thought, reflection, and inspiration regarding the Spirit life and how we as God’s beloved grow more as His disciples. In Chapter Three, I will begin to review some of these great theologians and what they have to offer to this body of work. Saints Benedict and Francis have Rules of Life that are still used today.

Contemporary mystics, Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton, give shape to the understanding of a present-day way of living the contemplative life. Theologian and author Stephen Macchia and others add insight into how to balance a postmodern life both within and outside of the church so that our people can find the meaning that they seek. Of course, John Wesley’s work and the work of contemporary Wesleyans will be formational to my project as well. Wesley, Maddix and Leclerc, Willimon, Jones, Heath,

Job and others will place the more general concepts of spiritual formation and Rule of Life into a functional approach to spiritual growth within a Methodist culture.

Chapter Four

I will explore all aspects of the project I am undertaking in Chapter Four. Included will be the survey instrument that was used by the participants, the anecdotal accounts of group interactions, and the results that were found at the end of the project both individually and collectively. The reader will have an opportunity to have a bird's eye view to the project. Did clergy continue in the project over the four weeks? Did they see any growth or change as a result of their participation? What long-term goals might their participation have engendered according to their post-project survey and reports? All of these questions will be reviewed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five

In Chapter Five, I will develop the outcomes of the project and the conclusions that can be drawn from them. I will review the effect that the clergy had from participating in these Rule of Life groups and what both they and I have derived from the experience. I will end this work with some thoughts as to next steps to take in assisting the clergy within Northern Maine in living and growing more into the likeness of Christ and moving onward toward perfection in love.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: GOD IS LOVE

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

—1 John 4:8

On his death bed, John Wesley told those who were attending him that he “fervently desired a sermon he had written on the love of God should be scattered abroad and given away to everybody.”¹ For Wesley, there was nothing more foundational to our Christian faith and understanding than to recognize that God is love. Indeed, Wesley has been characterized as the Theologian of Love by some. Henry H. Knight wrote of Wesley, “His dying wish was the same as the passion of his life, namely, that everyone might come to know God’s love for them in Christ.”²

This one theological construct, God is love and God loves us, is the basis for our conversion and for our ongoing spiritual growth and development. Biblically and theologically, this understanding is the foundation for my understanding of spiritual theology.

Specifically, I am a Methodist and understand my theology based on a Wesleyan perspective. It is not enough to accept the personal saving love of Christ in one’s life, for there can be no holiness without social holiness. As Jesus said in John 17:20-26,

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We

¹ Percy Livingston Parker, *The Heart of John Wesley’s Journal* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 2014), 526.

² Henry H. Knight III, “Consider Wesley: A Theology of Love,” *Catalyst*, December 4, 2013, accessed December 7, 2018, <http://www.catalystresources.org/a-theology-of-love/>.

are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

In the pages to come, I will parse out this theology of Trinitarian love within a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification and the role of the church in assisting each Christian in their spiritual growth and development. This specific theological foundation is the reason behind the invitation offered to United Methodist clergy in Northern Maine to deepen their spiritual walk and to share that deepening with other like-minded clergy.

God is Love

For Methodists, striving for a closer walk with the Lord and eventual sanctification, knowing God as a loving God is the first rung on the ladder. It is indeed a comfort to recognize Paul’s assertion to us from his letter to the Romans,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.³

Of course, Scripture is saturated with assurances of this most important attribute of God. First John 4:7-8 tells us plainly, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”⁴ In his notes of 1 John 4:8, Wesley wrote, “God is often styled holy, righteous, wise; but not holiness, righteousness or wisdom in the abstract, as he is said to be love; intimating that this is his darling, his

³ Romans 8:35-39.

⁴ 1 John 4:7-8.

reigning attribute, the attribute that shed an amiable glory on all his other perfections.”⁵

John 3:16, Ephesians 2:4, John 13:34, and Deuteronomy 7:8 all assert a God of love and God’s love specifically for us.

The epitome of this love is found in God’s saving action in the person of Jesus Christ. “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”⁶

In her vision of God, Julian of Norwich saw, “truly that if he might die once for each man who shall be saved as he died once for all, love would never let him rest until he had done it. And when he had done it, he would still think nothing of it out of love; for everything seems a trifle to him in comparison with his love.”⁷

God’s great love for the world, and humankind, specifically, is not only foundational to our Christian understanding of God’s nature, it is the impetus for us to respond in love to God, God’s created world, and God’s other children. As Gordon Smith asserts, “There is no other foundation for spiritual growth and vitality than the confidence that we are loved. This is the gospel: God loves us.”⁸

Saint Theresa wrote in her book, *No Greater Love*, “Let us understand the tenderness of God’s love. For He speaks in the Scripture, ‘Even if a mother could forget her child, I will not forget you. I have carved you on the palm of my hand.’”⁹ A parent’s

⁵ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe: The Core Of Wesleyan Faith And Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 7.

⁶ 1 John 4:9-10.

⁷ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Penguin Group, 1998), 19.

⁸ Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus Discernment, Prayer and the Witness of the Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 78.

⁹ Mother Teresa, *No Greater Love* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1995), 24.

love for their child is intimate, unconditional, and uncompromising. It is this kind of love that God has for each one of us.

Henri Nouwen writes of this love in his book *Life of the Beloved*. He writes:

I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you, my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I'll give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover and your spouse...yes, even your child...wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.¹⁰

What each of these theologians recognizes is not only that God is best known through God's nature, love, but that God's love is best understood when we come to an awareness that God loves us, specifically and intimately. It is the experience of being loved by God that allows us to resonate with the words of these theologians. Knowing God loves the world is best understood when we have a first-hand experience that "Jesus loves me, this I know."

Love Manifest through Creation

If the concept of a God whose essential nature is love is to be accepted, one may need to delve into how this love is made manifest. How can we know that this assertion is indeed accurate? Perhaps the most compelling argument that one can offer is within the creation of humankind itself. Scripture tells us in Genesis 1:27, "So, God created

¹⁰ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 30.

mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”¹¹

God had created the skies, oceans, land, sun, moon, animals and plants and had deemed all good as the Genesis account relates, but God made one more creation before God rested and God had something different in mind. God breathed his own breath into humankind and cared for mankind with a special tenderness. In Genesis 2:18, God had compassion on Adam and chose to make a helpmate for him, desiring Adam to have a human companion. Eve came into being and both were able to enjoy fellowship with God as they walked through the Garden together. God’s love for humankind included God’s invitation for humankind to have a co-creative function with God as we see in Genesis 2:19 in Adam’s naming of the creatures God had made. *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary* states,

The involvement in the creative process of those created in the divine image takes the form of a command (1:28). The first divine words to human beings are about their relationship, not to God but to the earth. They constitute a sharing of the exercise of power (dominion). From the beginning, God chooses not to be the only one who has or exercises creative power.¹²

From the beginning God had a special love and hope for mankind. Wesley’s understanding of this special relationship and our hope for mankind can be seen in his 1760 sermon entitled “The New Birth:” “In this image of God was man made. ‘God is love’ [1 John 4:8, 16]; accordingly, man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth, so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator”.¹³

¹¹ Genesis 1:27.

¹² Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Volume I* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 345-346.

¹³ S. T. Kimbrough Jr., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 64.

The Scriptures are replete with the theme of God's love for humankind through God's creative function. Psalm 100:3 tells the reader, "Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."¹⁴ Psalm 8:5-8, Psalm 138:8, Hebrews 2:7, and 1 Corinthians 11:7 all speak of God's love through God's creation of humankind. Perhaps Psalm 139 is the most notable reference as it relates, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth."¹⁵

Trinitarian Unity

God's love is seen most fully through the very nature of God as three in one. The Creation story begins with Creator God declaring, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."¹⁶ God's unitive action can also be inferred within Jesus' birth narrative as well. According to Luke, when Mary inquired as to how she might be able to bear the Christ child given her virginal state, "The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'"¹⁷ Within both creation and Jesus' conception, we see all three persons of the Trinity collaborating in their actions.

¹⁴ Psalm 100:3.

¹⁵ Psalm 139:13-16.

¹⁶ Genesis 1:26.

¹⁷ Luke 1:35.

In Matthew 3:16-17 we see the Trinity in action once more and, in this account, we are given a glimpse into the relationship between each member of the Trinity. “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” Clearly, love between the members of the Trinity is part of the Divine nature.

Simon Chan asserts that we must take care not to view the Trinity through own biases. He contends that our own social values can creep into our Trinitarian theological conceptions if we are not careful. Chan reminds us that the Trinity is first and foremost a mystery.¹⁸ Indeed, the very best we can do in understanding God is never going to take in the magnitude of who God is, Trinitarian and otherwise. Yet, while Chan’s admonishments are valid, Scripture clearly spells out the love between the Trinitarian members.

Richard Rohr contends that the very best we can do is to “circle around” with humility as we strive to live into our understanding. Rohr states, “Whatever is going on in God is a flow, a radical relatedness, a perfect communion between Three– a circle dance of love.”¹⁹ Clearly, if we are to accept God’s love for ourselves, we first need to understand God’s love within the Trinity. Rohr reflects that this notion of the Trinitarian dance is as old and as traditional as our early Greek Fathers. Rohr cites Brother Elias Marechal, a monk at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit who wrote,

An infinite current of love streams without ceasing, to and fro, to and fro, to and fro: gliding from the Father to the Son and back to the Father, in one timeless happening. This circular current of trinitarian love continues night and day...The

¹⁸ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 50.

¹⁹ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 27.

orderly and rhythmic process of subatomic particles spinning round and round at immense speed echoes its dynamism.²⁰

As we see in the baptismal account, Jesus, Father God, and Holy Spirit all intertwined in a dance, a perfect communion of love and intention.

Trinitarian Relatedness

This understanding of a Trinitarian God grounded in love and community is more perfectly understood when we add a fourth element into the Creative Dance; humankind. Going back to the Genesis account, God created humankind in God's own image, unlike everything else God had made, and God gave Adam a co-creative role in naming and caring for Creation. God did not stop with that, however. We see further, in the Genesis account of the Fall, that God was in the habit of visiting with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day.²¹ God desired a relationship with the humans that he had created in his image. Rohr asserts, "The foundational good news is that creation and humanity have been drawn into this flow! We are not outsiders or spectators but inherently part of the divine dance."²² Rohr continues this theme, citing scholar C Baxter Kruger:

The stunning truth is that this triune God, in amazing and lavish love, determined to open the circle and share the Trinitarian life with others. This is the one, eternal and abiding reason for the creation of the world and of human life. There is no other God, no other will of God, no second plan, no hidden agenda for human beings. Before the creation of the world, the Father, Son and Spirit set their love upon us and planned to bring us to share and know and experience the Trinitarian life itself. Unto this end the cosmos was called into being. And the human race was fashioned, and Adam and Eve were given a place in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Father's Son himself, in and through who the dream of our adoption would be accomplished.²³

²⁰ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 27.

²¹ Genesis 3:8.

²² Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 67.

²³ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 68.

Scripture abounds with this assurance. Perhaps John says it best. In Peterson's *The Message*, we find these words from John 15,

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant.²⁴

Jesus brings the Trinitarian relationship more into focus as he continues. "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love."²⁵

The prayer that Jesus prays in John 17 adds to our understanding of how the circle of love is to grow. Jesus prays,

I'm praying not only for them but also for those who will believe in me because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind— Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you. So, they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they'll be as unified and together as we are— I in them and you in me.²⁶

The ultimate goal here is for Christian community to emulate the relationship within the Trinity— to, in fact, become part of it, organic and intimate, fruitful and abundant. When we embrace this relational and loving way of living, we are answering Jesus' prayer for each of us and for the church. This is the way we best join in kingdom living.

²⁴ John 15:4-8, MSG.

²⁵ John 15:9-10, MSG.

²⁶ John 17:20-23, MSG.

God's Love through Forgiveness

Despite our best instincts to be loving however, we often fail to live up to that kind of lifestyle. We were still in our infancy as God's formed creatures when we betrayed God and opened ourselves up to sin. And while we could not be faithful in our relationship with God, God remained faithful in God's love for us. As fallen creatures, this gift of grace and mercy is as humbling as it is welcome. The Psalmist tells us in Psalm 86:5, "For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you."²⁷ The Prophet continues this theme in Isaiah 43:25-26 as we are assured, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Put me in remembrance; let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right."²⁸

Of course, God's ultimate act of forgiving came through the person of Jesus Christ who put sin behind us once and for all. The words given to God's people before the Eucharistic meal in a United Methodist service bring this comfort to light: "Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!"²⁹

Paul expresses Jesus' salvific love for us with clarity.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the

²⁷ Psalm 86:5.

²⁸ Isaiah 43:25-26.

²⁹ *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 33.

incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.³⁰

Knowing that God is a loving and forgiving God who longs for a relationship with us is the foundation of our walk as disciples. Through God’s grace, we can begin to reach out to others in that way of love, recognizing that we will fall short on any number of occasions, but assured that God will forgive us every time. In many ways, this humble recognition of our own frailties helps us to draw closer to other failed humans. It is not so much that misery loves company but more that when we are open to our own vulnerabilities and the grace we have been freely given by God, we are free to extend grace to others who are just as vulnerable as we are.

Wesleyan Evangelism

If we are to be united with the Trinity in love, bearing the good works that Scripture promises, we need other partners. In fact, it is because of the magnitude of this love and our reaction to it that we desire to share it with those we meet. Willimon asserts, “Grace, particularly as it is described in the Wesleyan tradition, is relational—God relating to us in ways that are enlightening, transforming and empowering.”³¹ The closer we grow in our relationship with God, the more we desire to spread that kind of love to all we meet. It is more than answering the commandment found in John 13:34, to love one another, for this love we are compelled to pour out comes from deep within us. As Jesus promises us in John 15:5, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much

³⁰ Ephesians 2:1-10.

³¹ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 50.

fruit.”³² That fruit is first and foremost love that we pour out to God and to each other much the way we respond when we are in the first blush of a new love affair when we not only love the object of our devotion but everyone we come into contact with. This love is contagious.

For Wesley, living in the world meant living in peace and harmony as we reach out to all in the love that God has so freely given to us. Reuben Job asserts that this way of living and relating to one another comes directly from Jesus in Mark 12:29-31. Job cites, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength and the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” to make his point.³³

Living in harmony and peace with one another sounds like a tall order especially in the social climate we live in today. While strife exists all around us, even within the church, when we fixate on Jesus, connected to Him, we find ourselves beginning to leave behind some of the petty ways of relating that we once felt so at home with.

Wesley enjoins us to this type of life and this way of relating to one another in his treatise, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion.” He writes,

This is the religion we long to see established in the world. A religion of love and joy and peace, having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing forth not only in all innocence, but likewise in every kind of beneficence, in spreading virtue and happiness all around it.³⁴

United Methodist scholar Elaine Heath shares a vision of God’s love and our reaction to it based on her own Wesleyan understanding. She writes,

³² John 15:5.

³³ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 8.

³⁴ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 128.

When we believe in and experience God's love as God's meaning, love becomes our meaning, for we become like the God we worship. As those who gaze day by day into the eyes of the One who sees us with pity and not with blame, we are changed.... The stone rolls away from the tomb of the church and Christ strides out in to the morning. Love is our meaning.³⁵

As Christians, and surely as Christian leaders, this notion of love being our *modus operandi* needs to take center stage. It is easy to get caught up in worldly endeavors. We can become distracted with efforts to become successful, to provide for families, to get ahead in the world, and lose our focus on Christ and His mandate to love one another.

Wesley summarizes the way we should live with others by three maxims; Do No Harm, Do Good, Stay In Love With God. In Rueben Job's treatise on the subject, he states,

As did John Wesley and those in the early Methodist movement before me, I too will determine every day that my life will always be invested in the effort to bring healing instead of hurt; wholeness instead of division; and harmony with the way of Jesus rather than the ways of the world. When I commit myself to this way, I must see each person as a child of God—a recipient of love unearned, unlimited and undeserved—just like myself. And it is this vision of every other person as the object of God's love and deep awareness that I too live in that loving Presence that can hold me accountable to my commitment to do no harm.³⁶

In true Methodist fashion, Wesley has outlined for us a simple formula of how we might go about relating to the world so that we can put into practice our desire to follow Christ in the way of love. By following these maxims, we are able to discern how to behave in all the interactions we have with others.

³⁵ Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemporary Vision for Christian Outreach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 48.

³⁶ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules*, 31.

Wesleyan Social Holiness

For United Methodists, this call to love and serve others is of paramount importance. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* states, “We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. By joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing.”³⁷ Wesley advises us, “The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.”³⁸ In his journal entry from August 12, 1738, Wesley writes, “There is scarce any possible way of doing good for which here is not daily occasion.... Here are poor families to be relieved: Here are children to be educated: Here are workhouses, wherein both young and old gladly receive the word of exhortation: Here are the prisons, and therein a complication of all human wants.”³⁹ A Wesleyan understanding insists that our ministry among the poor and disenfranchised is evidence of God’s Spirit within us as we seek to welcome these lowly among us as if they were Jesus himself.

Indeed, if love is the foundation of a United Methodist theological understanding, reaching out to the least of these, or social holiness, is its heartbeat. The love of God and our immersion into it compels us as United Methodists to love the world and all of God’s children especially those who are marginalized by our society. Just as Jesus did when he ate with sinners, blessed the children, and healed the infirmed, true Wesleyans cannot help but reach out in compassion and mercy to those who are in need.⁴⁰

³⁷ *The Book of Discipline Of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 53.

³⁸ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 124.

³⁹ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules*, 35.

⁴⁰ Eating with sinners – Matthew 9:10-17; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:29-29. Blessing children – Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17. Healing the infirmed – Matthew 8:16; Mark 6:56; Luke 4:40.

Willimon asserts, “Works for Wesley are the result not of our earnest effort to do good things for the less fortunate, but rather as a sure sign that the Holy Spirit is working in us to enable us to do that which we could not do on our own.”⁴¹ He goes on to suggest that Wesley looked to Galatians 5:22-23, Paul’s image of the fruit of the Spirit, to argue that the work being done by his flock, for the marginalized, was evidence that the Holy Spirit was actively involved.⁴²

Elaine Heath suggests, “To be people whose meaning is love is to become broken bread and poured out wine. It is about embracing holiness for the sake of the world.”⁴³ This social holiness can be manifested in many ways. Heath lifts up two examples of this type of sacrificial love in the lives of Methodist Phoebe Palmer and Russian priest Father Arseny. Both saints experienced much suffering and both brought many into a relationship with Christ due to their complete acceptance of God’s love in the midst of their suffering and their complete devotion to love others.

Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, chief executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, speaks of the Methodist commitment to social holiness in her statement about the Methodist church:

Social holiness is unique to Methodism. United Methodists have a long commitment to social holiness. It is in our DNA. It is part of who we are. Wesley has said, “There is no religion that is not social, no holiness that is not social.” Wesley goes on to say that without social holiness, we cannot exist. It is because of God’s love for us and Christ’s love that we reach out into the world to walk with others and to accompany them in their journeys. Because social holiness is unique to us, it means that we must be in this together. We live our lives together and we live our lives with all of God’s creation. We walk with one another. We walk with those who are poor, those who are vulnerable, those who live on the margins of life. It is a gift that God has given us, and we have claimed as

⁴¹ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 125.

⁴² William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 125.

⁴³ Elaine Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, 49.

Methodists who are committed to social holiness; that we would be with one another in this journey as we live our lives together.⁴⁴

Responding to our neighbors in need, is the most ingrained aspect of United Methodist practice. While we may be known for our singing, our bean suppers, and our missionary efforts, there is no United Methodist church that does not embody social holiness. This is the church at its finest.

Spiritual Formation in the Church

While it may be part of our nature as Christ's family members, bathed in the love of our Triune God, to reach out to others with that same love, it takes effort on our part. We may desire to bring the Kingdom of God to earth and we might desire for one and all to know the love of God, but we are still bound by our worldlier influences and our less Godly impulses. The work of sanctification takes time and a partnership between us and the Holy Spirit. Part of us longs to affirm Paul's words to the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."⁴⁵ But we cannot escape our tendency to slip back into old habits and less Godly inclinations. We can't help but recognize ourselves in Paul's statements in the book of Romans when he reports,

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the

⁴⁴ UMC.org, "United Methodist Beliefs: Social Holiness," September 7, 2017, accessed December 7, 2018, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/united-methodist-beliefs-social-holiness>.

⁴⁵ Galatians 2:20.

evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.⁴⁶

Simon Chan writes,

The purpose of Christian formation is not developing a better self-image, achieving self-fulfillment or finding self-affirmation; nor is it the development of individualistic qualities that make singularly outstanding saints. Rather, it is developing certain qualities that enable us to live responsibly within the community that we have been baptized into.⁴⁷

“At its best, the church is to be the place where the people of God gather together for worship, instruction, fellowship, encouragement, the sharing of resources and to be equipped for service to the world,” writes Fred Fullerton, the Vice President of Spiritual and Leadership Development at Northwest Nazarene University.⁴⁸ And yet Chan notes, “We expect everyone in the church to be the remnant reaching out to the world. But there is a whole body of people belonging to the visible church who are at best partially committed.”⁴⁹

It is apparent that we cannot reach out to the world in love unless we ourselves have been filled. In New England, we have often been labeled as the “frozen chosen.” We tend to be a bit circumspect in our worship and in our spiritual development. Many of our church members fill their church hours with committee meetings, acts of compassion and mercy, and the business of church functioning. It may be that part of our lack of commitment results from our lack of spiritual fullness. If we are to reach out to others in love without the fear of burn out, we need to prioritize our own spiritual nurture. One

⁴⁶ Romans 7:14-20.

⁴⁷ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 18.

⁴⁸ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 103.

⁴⁹ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 105.

hour a week was never intended to be the norm. How can any relationship, let alone our relationship with God, be maintained with so little time and devotion?

Given that we know why we need to grow in our spiritual walk as community, the question remains how to facilitate this growth in happening. Christian Schwarz states, “Unfeigned, practical love has a divinely generated magnetic power far more effective than evangelistic programs which depend almost entirely on verbal communication. People do not want to hear us talk about love, they want to experience how Christian love really works.”⁵⁰

Scripture gives us a model of corporate growth and nourishment in the Acts 2 church structure. Acts 2:42-47 states,

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In this church structure, we find practices and behaviors that contributed to the growth of the individual members and to the church as a community. The Acts 2 community committed themselves to prayer, Bible study, communion, and acts of service. This church and its members saw signs and wonders because of their united vision and practices that seemed to flow out of their deep reverence for Christ. Because they lived out Jesus’ mandate to be the branches to His vine, firmly focused on Him at all times, they were spiritually alive and both individual and numerical growth was the natural outcome.

⁵⁰ Christian Schwartz, *Natural Church Development* (St Charles IL: Church Smart Resources, 1996), 36.

Leadership in the Church

While the work of transforming the world belongs to Christ's church as a unit, every church needs to have a strong Christian leader to encourage and support the church body in its spiritual growth and ministerial endeavors. Reverend Margaret Marcuson writes, "We cannot lead others further than we are willing to go ourselves. If we want people to go deeper in the spiritual life...we have to show the way. Leadership starts with us."⁵¹

Clearly, the best model for leadership is seen in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Stephen A. Macchia writes, "Jesus exemplified the life of a servant while offering strong leadership and vision. His investment in the lives of his disciples was the focus of his entire being—in fact, his investment cost him his life."⁵²

If we are going to model ourselves after our Lord Jesus, we need to look more closely at how he found strength, wisdom and refreshment. Mark 1:35 tells us, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."⁵³ Matthew 14:23 states, "After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone."⁵⁴ These are just a few of the accounts of Jesus praying and finding time to spend with his Father in heaven. Clearly, if we are going to be effective disciples and Christian leaders, we must devote our selves to a lifestyle of prayer: morning, noon, and night.

⁵¹ Margaret J. Marcuson, *Leaders That Last* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2009), 5.

⁵² Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 5.

⁵³ Mark 1:35.

⁵⁴ Matthew 14:23.

Chan writes, “There is nothing so contagious as holiness, nothing more pervasive than prayer.”⁵⁵

Macchia states, “Scriptures and prayer are the bedrock of our existence as Christ’s followers, yesterday, today and forever.”⁵⁶ If we are going to foster this type of prayerful lifestyle in our congregations, we first have to develop it ourselves. Gregory Clapper writes that prayer is the most basic work of the Christian, and for Wesley “this included public prayer, family prayer, as well as private prayer.”⁵⁷ Many will find, like Jesus, set times during our day to pray and reflect. The Daily Office is one common practice that many in monasteries around the world use for their devotions. Tony Jones writes, “Through the daily practice of prayer, worship, work, and study, a growing number of men and women of faith today seek to keep in step with the sacred rhythms of faithful and faith-filled participation with God in the real world and in real time.”⁵⁸

While most pastors and church leaders begin their vocational life with a desire to spend more time with God in sacred activities, it is easy for the realities of the day to take over. Ministers everywhere are busy people. The needs of their congregation, the administration of the church, community outreach, and denominational responsibilities, as well as personal and family needs can choke out time spent with God. And yet, if we are to grow spiritually, love our neighbor, and stay in love with God, we need to prioritize this devotional time. Our members are most likely to grow as they see us model for them how to live this life of devotion and priority of placing God first. It is not

⁵⁵ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 106.

⁵⁶ Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 18.

⁵⁷ Gregory Clapper, *As If the Heart Mattered* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 89.

⁵⁸ Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix, *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm* (Kansas City, KS: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 113.

enough to tell our congregants how to live a devoted life, we must walk the walk. We can't lead them where we ourselves are not currently residing.

As Christian leaders immerse themselves in the Godly community of the Trinity through prayer, they enhance their own ability to lead their unique communities of faith. Holt asserts, "The charismatic element in Christianity refers to the spiritual gifts given to individual Christians for the common good.... Christian spirituality in the early centuries was communal spirituality."⁵⁹ Indeed, Macchia asserts that our goal as servant leaders is humbly to care for the people whom God has entrusted to us so that they can be built up enough to care for the world. He writes, "Humility, servanthood, shepherding—three essential principles of servant leadership."⁶⁰

Macchia brings us back to the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12 where Paul shares his maternal love for the church and his delight in sharing his life with these saints. Macchia sites Ephesians 4:11-13 for a model of servant leadership.⁶¹ Paul writes,

And he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity, in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.⁶²

We see in Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ, and our Trinitarian understanding of God, that we were meant to be immersed in community. We were meant to share our gifts with one another right from the beginning when God created us.

⁵⁹ Bradley Holt, *Thirsty For God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*, Third Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 50.

⁶⁰ Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 118.

⁶¹ Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 119.

⁶² Ephesians 4:11-13.

Genesis 2:18 affirms that we are not meant to be on our own. We were formed to be part of a whole. This understanding of our need for each other both to use our gifts and to receive the gifts of others, is foundational to our understanding of what it means to be church. It is also foundational to our understanding of spiritual development. We grow best when we are with others, whether we are the leaders of the church or one of its members.

Congregational Spiritual Formation

Speaking of the church, Peterson asserts that one of its roles is to teach us to be community. He cites John 17:11-23 as a basis for this assertion. Jesus has indeed prayed and is praying for God to make us one as he and the Father are one. And yet Peterson asserts, “Getting saved is easy; becoming a community is difficult—damnably difficult.”⁶³ Peterson reminds us that we find hope in the resurrection of Jesus who resurrects each one of us and our community of faith. Peterson suggests that prayer is our common language within our community and that love and forgiveness are our calling cards. Peterson asserts, “Overall, the most distinctive thing about Christian love is that it is commanded, not urged, not encouraged, not striven for as a goal, but commanded (1 John 4:21).”⁶⁴ For Peterson, when we live a life of submission to God, with the Holy Spirit at work, we are able to bring this counter-cultural community into being.⁶⁵

Most of us have seen the church at its best, when love really is our mandate, but many of us have also seen the church at its worst, when division and strife are the order

⁶³ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays In Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005), 250.

⁶⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays In Ten Thousand Places*, 326.

⁶⁵ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 244.

of the day. When you have faced betrayal within the church it is difficult to come back from the wounds, and it is a sure sign that the community of faith has strayed from its focus on loving Jesus and our neighbors as ourselves. It is much harder to be at odds with our church family when we are all immersed in prayer and bible study together. When we are truly allowing the Spirit to work within us, we find less hostility toward one another, less of a need to be right, more of a desire for harmony and forgiveness. First Corinthians 12:12-15 shows us how it should be:

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Both Wesley and Evan B. Howard assert that the church, or the “community of God’s people,” is a means of grace in our spiritual formation. Howard outlines several ways that the church is about the business of spiritual formation. First, he states the church is a means of grace simply by being the church. Howard says, “Through the common prayer of liturgy, the common sharing of the charisms of the Spirit, the common reflection on our identity and history, and the interaction of life together, believers are formed in the faith.”⁶⁶ He continues to note that group guidance, individual spiritual direction, and the unspoken socialization found within our churches offer spiritual formation to our members.

⁶⁶ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 288.

A Wesleyan Understanding of Sanctification and Spiritual Formation

Sanctifying grace, God's work in helping us move closer to perfection in love, is a hallmark of Wesley's core beliefs. Willimon asserts,

If grace is a distinctive Wesleyan emphasis, then sanctifying grace is the most distinctive aspect of the Wesleyan view of grace. God not only does something for us in our justification in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, but God continues actively to work in us in constantly drawing us nearer, in continually making us more loving and faithful, and empowering us to be better disciples—sanctifying grace.⁶⁷

Wesley firmly believed in the words found in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new Creation has come." However, in order to continue to be made new, we need constantly to call on the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's very breath. Willimon writes, "Because our spiritual respiration is not involuntary unlike our natural breathing, we must concentrate on being receptive to the Holy Spirit through prayer, and the sacraments, Bible Study and other spiritual practices that assist us in cultivating life in the Spirit."⁶⁸

Wesley is noted for his methodical process of forming disciples within the church through his use of class meetings, bands, and select societies. For Wesley, these small groups served as instructional entities for new believers, accountability partners for continued growth, and corporate places of prayer and study. Wesley divided up the "spiritual disciplines into three areas; inward, outward and corporate domains."⁶⁹ In the inward domain, Wesley focused on practices that would nurture the heart and soul such as prayer, scripture reading, meditation, and fasting. Practices in the outward domain were to foster right social behavior and included solitude, acts of mercy, and tithing.

⁶⁷ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 58.

⁶⁸ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 63.

⁶⁹ Diane Leclerc and Mark Maddix, *Spiritual Formation*, 77.

Corporate activities were communal and fostered accountability and included public confession and worship.

Small group ministries are still the best way to grow disciples. When we model ourselves after the Acts 2 church and the manner in which Jesus taught his disciples—investing in a few individuals to teach, worship and fellowship together over long periods of time—we find strong spiritual growth. However, in our fast-paced immediate results-oriented culture, this way of spiritual growth can be seen as cumbersome and not immediate enough. It takes time and a committed investment in community with the expectation that the Spirit is at work even during times when we may not have immediate evidence of our growth.

Wesley's focus was on the work of the Holy Spirit in each believer's sanctification and he noted spiritual activities that he called "means of grace." For him, instituted means of grace were practices such as prayer, fasting, reading Scriptures, and partaking of the Eucharist. These were instituted by Jesus and were particularly important to disciples' spiritual growth. Today, these same means of grace allow us to form intentional practices that can assist us in developing discipleship ministries. Many of our churches have lost focus on spiritual development and intentional discipleship-making. We seem to work hard at evangelizing and reaching out to our communities with acts of mercy while leaving spiritual development to Sunday morning worship and individual devotional practices. Both of these practices are helpful, but we would be better served by adding to them small groups participating in these means of grace communally.

While all the means of grace are important within a Wesleyan understanding, the Lord's Supper holds particular reverence. Willimon asserts, "The Lord's Supper is a sanctifying ordinance, a sign of the continuity, necessity, and availability of God's

enabling, communal, confirming, nurturing grace. Our characters are formed, sanctified, by such instruments of continual divine in our lives.”⁷⁰ While this view is not the same as a Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, Wesley stressed the transforming work of the Spirit within this celebration.

Wesley’s view of communion was indeed communal in nature. He believed that our gathering at the table was a time to find communion with God and with each other. And likewise, the sacrament of baptism within Methodism is seen as a communal event. Wesley believed that “baptism was a powerful sign that God had claimed us and owned us. Baptism was a promise and reassurance that God would continue to be with us throughout our journey as a Christian.”⁷¹ The service of baptism within the United Methodist Church is performed within the body of the church. The United Methodist Book of Worship states, “Those within the covenant constitute the community we call the Church; therefore, the services of the Baptismal Covenant are conducted during the public worship of the congregation where the person’s membership is to be held.”⁷²

Again, while individual acts of piety are important to our spiritual growth and the process of sanctification, our Trinitarian influence and our formation in God’s image necessitates that we find our best growth as disciples within our communities of faith. Within the sacraments of communion and baptism, we find ourselves closer to God and closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ. These means of grace cannot be stressed enough in our formation as disciples and Christian lovers.

⁷⁰ Diane Leclerc and Mark Maddix, *Spiritual Formation*, 84.

⁷¹ William H. Willimon, *This We Believe*, 119.

⁷² *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 81.

In Summary

In 1 John 4:8, John assures us that, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Knowing the God of love is the most basic tenet of our Christian faith. Without this understanding, we are left devoid of hope for us as individuals and for the communities in which we reside. Thankfully, our God loves us enough to give us the grace to know Him, in part; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While God’s three-in-one nature is much too mysterious for us to comprehend fully, the very fact of God’s communal nature allows us to be brought into this fold. Encased in God’s love, we naturally desire to share this grace with all those we meet. We long to reach out to the world as if we were ministering to Jesus Himself. Still, if we are to continue to grow in God’s grace, we need to maintain a life that incorporates prayer, bible study, worship, and Christian fellowship. When communities of faith live together in this way, we participate in bringing God’s Kingdom to earth just as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer.

Our Christian tradition has shown that one of the best ways to engage in this type of spiritual lifestyle is by following a Rule of Life. While clerics such as Saint Benedict and Saint Francis provide a model for living within a community of like-minded clerics, there are contemporary models for Christians who do not live in monastic communities. Heath and others offer their experience of living within semi-monastic communities that live by a Rule of Life. Macchia offers direction for Christian pastors and laity to craft their own Rules that allow for individual needs and propensities. Added to these individual Rules, Wesleyan small accountability groups offer Christian community for those who are not living within a monastic setting. In the pages to come, I will further investigate the advantages that can be found in living with a Rule of life from both our Christian tradition and within more contemporary settings. Living with a Wesleyan Rule of Life can enhance the life of busy pastors and allow the United Methodist pastors in

Northern Maine an avenue not only to their own health and happiness but to serve their churches with integrity and joy.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:1-2

Ministry in Northern Maine

Ministry is not for the faint of heart. It is often demanding, all-consuming, and fraught with challenge. There are pressures from congregants to meet their needs and expectations, pressures from denominational hierarchies, and pressures from within the hearts of pastors to do the best they can. Most ministers recognize this vocation as a sacred calling from God which is both a comfort and a challenge in its own right. It is comforting to know that God provides what is needed for those God calls, and yet challenging to live up to such a hallowed occupation.

Pastoral behavior often indicates that pastors have failed to recognize that while called by a heavenly God, they remain human, with bodies, minds, and souls that are firmly planted here on Earth. Often, pastors work long hours, sleep less than needed, eat haphazardly, and generally fail to care for their bodies the way that is needed. While pastors may preach about healthy relationships, they may find that their own families get ignored in the midst of busy church lives. Even the most important relationship, between God and themselves, can often be neglected. Sadly, devotion to God's church can often get in the way of devotion to God. While most pastors acknowledge that self-care and spiritual disciplines are important for wellness, it is often difficult to maintain the

rhythms that enhance pastors' physical, relational, and spiritual lives. Yet it is essential for pastors to take care of all aspects of their lives. United Methodist theologian William Willimon writes, "Because of the demanding nature of pastoral work, it is ethically essential for pastors to develop those habits and practices that enable them to keep focused and formed for the work."¹ Indeed, if pastors are to be the role models that their congregants need, they must be attentive to their own wellness.

Spiritual Formation

Helping congregants grow in their spiritual formation is an important function for pastors. Most pastors spend more than a bit of time preparing bible studies, prayer groups, church retreats and other avenues to help their congregants grow in their faith. Indeed, while we often reflect on the Great Commission in terms of evangelism, it would be simplistic to believe that making disciples of Jesus Christ begins and ends with a conversion moment. Disciples come into a relationship with Christ needing some way to grow into the faith they espouse. While most pastors have advanced in their sanctification journey, this is one journey that needs constant attention so that spiritual growth will be an ongoing process. While candidates for ordination within the United Methodist Church vow that they believe that they are moving on toward perfection, each knows that this Wesleyan theological construct meant that disciples could be so in love with God that they would not sin knowingly. This type of love only occurs with many years of intentional spiritual formation. Pastors cannot truly bring their congregants along on this journey unless they are also engaged in their own formation experiences.

¹ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 307.

John Ackerman asserts, “A seeking spirituality is focused not on a place so much as on the activity of searching for meaning, journeying through life. The new patterns accept a great deal of diversity and choice.”² Indeed there are as many paths to enhanced spirituality as there are people to journey them. Ackerman suggests that each person begin with asking Jesus which practice or discipline each individual might follow. He writes, “Instead of starting with someone else’s idea of a spiritual discipline or practice, why not ask Jesus? Then the practice comes from God and not from our idea of being holy.”³ For some, Bible study and prayer are good routes. For others, walking a labyrinth or spending time in nature are important. Whenever we are in a holy space where we can listen intently to God, our spirits are growing. While the list of practices is exhaustive, some of the most important follow.

Prayer

There is not a pastor worth his or her vocation who does not understand that each ministry task, each sermon to be preached, each parishioner to be comforted, each meeting to be run needs to begin with prayer. Willimon asserts,

In prayer, the one who is so often talking about God becomes the one who sits silently and listens to God. The one who so often gives, is enabled to receive. As we have noted, friendship is essential for pastoral perseverance, and prayer is the principal means that we practice our friendship with the one who called us to this ministry.⁴

Richard Foster poetically shares his assertion that God is waiting for each person, pastor or laity, to come home. He writes, “And he is inviting you – and me – to come

² John Ackerman, *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2001), 13.

³ John Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 63.

⁴ William H. Willimon, *Pastor*, 327.

home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created.”⁵ This metaphor could not be more appropriate and compelling and yet nothing new to most pastors. Pastors are always encouraging their flocks to begin or to enhance their prayer practices. Still, as life and ministry get busier and busier, our own prayer practices often become dull or perfunctory. Poet and author Regina Ryan shares these words in her poem *Praying Dangerously*: “Let us instead pray dangerously— wantonly, lustily, passionately. Let us demand with every ounce of our strength, let us storm the gates of heaven, let us shake up ourselves and our plaster saints from the sleep of years.”⁶ If pastors engaged in dangerous prayer as a discipline, they might find their lives and ministry greatly enhanced, perhaps even greatly advanced!

There are many ways to pray. We can pray extemporaneously. We can pray more formally. We pray in worship services and we pray at home in our prayer closets. Joseph Schmidt offers us the practice of praying our experiences. He writes, “Praying our experiences is the practice of reflecting on and entering honestly into our everyday experiences in order to become aware of God’s word in them and to offer ourselves through them to God.”⁷ This kind of prayer is less formal but similar to a more classical type of prayer, the Ignatian prayer of Examine.

Ignatius, a Jesuit monk, wrote a manual, *The Spiritual Exercises*, as a complete program for leading seekers through a thirty-day spiritual retreat. Part of the *Exercises* is the Daily Examen, where an individual reviews the events of the day; searching for any

⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 1.

⁶ Regina Sara Ryan, *Praying Dangerously: Radical Reliance on God* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 2001), vi.

⁷ Joseph Schmidt, *Praying Our Experiences* (Winona, MN: Christian Brothers Publications, 1991), 15.

known sins committed and for where God could be found. The prayer includes one's feelings, and actions and is both practical and profound. As we review the day's events, pray for forgiveness where needed, and search for how God is leading us, we may set goals for the future or simply give thanks for all that God has brought to mind.⁸

The Jesus Prayer is another prayer practice that many find particularly meaningful. In this prayer, words of Scripture form a simple and meditative prayer. "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" is the phrase many recite over and over again. Holt writes, "The fundamental idea of the Jesus Prayer is to pray constantly. This requires a kind of attention to God that becomes habitual while one goes about the tasks of daily life."⁹ This meditative prayer helps keep the individual focused on listening to God rather than offering God our own thoughts, needs, and requests.

This attentiveness to God's presence is often called centering prayer. Foster warns that centering prayer is not easy. As soon as we choose to be attentive, our mind often wanders and fills itself up with so many other issues and concerns. When we do find ourselves free of our distractions, we can enter into God's rest. Foster writes, "Precisely because the Lord is present with us, we can relax and let go of everything, for in his presence nothing really matters, nothing is of importance except attending to him.... We allow his great silence to still our noisy hearts."¹⁰

Centering Prayer can be the first step to a deeper experience of God called contemplation. In contemplation, not only are we aware of God's presence, we offer our devotion to God and accept God's love for us. Foster and Griffin write in their *Spiritual*

⁸ Bradley Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 109.

⁹ Bradley Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 80.

¹⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*, 162.

Classics, “We discover that long before we came to our place of prayer, he was seeking us. So, he responds to our longing. We bask in the warmth of his love. We feel his gaze on us. He fills us with his Spirit.”¹¹ Who would not be thrilled to enjoy such an experience of the Divine? Yet, being this close to God can also be quite challenging. Chris Webb writes, “Often the idea of an open-ended, uncontrollable exposure to the presence of God makes us very uncomfortable. It should. In contemplative prayer, we place ourselves without reservation in the hands of God cast beyond our imagining, more powerful than we could ever hope to express, and fiercely holy.”¹²

We have just touched the surface of the ways we can pray. The way we pray is secondary to finding a prayer that fits our personalities and helps us to find a closer relationship with God. Pastors may find that the more they experiment with types of prayers, the more they are able to help their congregants find a style of prayer that works for them. As in most things, one style does not fit all.

Scripture: Praying God’s Word

One of the ways we pray best is by reading and reflecting on Scripture. Henri Nouwen, asserts, “Anyone who takes the spiritual life seriously and wants to enter more deeply into the encounter with God realizes immediately the need for formation and direction.”¹³ One of the avenues to spiritual formation is by reading Scripture; not for the purpose of study or to prepare for a sermon, but to draw closer to God. Eugene Peterson

¹¹ Richard J. Foster and Emile Griffin, *Spiritual Classics* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 16.

¹² Chris Webb, *The Fire of the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 182.

¹³ Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of The Spirit* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010), xix.

writes, “Reading and praying our way through these history saturated pages of Scripture, we gradually get it: This is what it means to be a woman, a man— mostly it means dealing with God. God using the authenticating reality of our daily experience as the stuff for working out his purposes of salvation in us and in the world.”¹⁴

There are many ways to read and pray through the Scriptures but the one that has the longest tradition and history is *Lectio Divina*; the slow reading and meditation on the Word and what it is saying to each one of us personally. This spiritual reading was instituted first in monastic settings, but it is still one of the most profound passageways to God and to our spiritual formation today. Mulholland advises, “I suggest that you respond to what you read in this book with your heart and spirit rather than with your rational, cognitive intellectual faculties.”¹⁵

This type of scriptural prayer may be difficult at first. Any new practice has moments of difficulty and this type of reflection takes a life time to master. Yet, as we persevere in opening our hearts and minds to God through His Word, more and more, year by year, our lives are transformed. Not only do we comprehend Scripture in a new way, but we come to know ourselves and our God in a more expanded fashion. Casey asserts, “*Lectio Divina* is one concrete means of opening to the action of grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶

Thelma Hall offers four movements to this type of practice; *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. In *lectio*, a short passage of scripture is read slowly several

¹⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 139.

¹⁵ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped By the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000), 20.

¹⁶ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading the Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO, Liguori/Triumph, 1996), 6.

times as we try to take in all that the Word has for us. In meditatio, we enter more fully into the Word. Hall writes, “In some comparable interior or exterior way we too must acknowledge the holiness of the God we approach. Recognizing the wonder and mystery of the gift of faith which enables us to consciously come before him in prayer.”¹⁷ Oratio invites us to offer our hearts to God surrendering all of ourselves into His care. Finally, in contemplatio, we find our minds stilled. We are no longer thinking about God but are melting into God. In this final stage we have left ourselves behind and are able simply to be in God’s presence.¹⁸ As with all kinds of deep prayer, this level of experience takes years of practice. We cannot allow ourselves to become discouraged if we do not achieve it instantly. Indeed, it is often our dedication to the practice itself that brings spiritual growth.

A practice of Lectio Divina, this slow cogitation of the Word, may go against the grain of our modern push to rush everything, attempting to get more and more into a single moment of each day, but it is that decision to slow down enough to allow God’s Spirit to meet ours that makes all the difference in our spiritual lives.

Sabbath Care

The discipline of prayer and this choice counter-culturally to give ourselves and our time to God is only the starting point in developing a more spiritually active lifestyle. Scripture reminds us to go back to our basics. One has only to go back to the commandments to find the place to begin. We find in the book of Exodus,

¹⁷ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 39.

¹⁸ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 45.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.¹⁹

Pastors cannot find balance in their lives until they stop all their activity and observe the Sabbath. Adding a list of spiritual disciplines to practice, developing a better schedule, and joining a gym may all be helpful at some point but not as a first step. Busy people who have very good intentions can be convicted of their need for spending more time with God but if it is simply an item to be added to the checklist for the day's activity, it misses the point. It is necessary to stop all activity and simply be with God. In his book *Rest in the Storm*, Kirk Byron Jones recounts the story of a legendary pianist who is asked how he played the notes so well. "The artist responded, 'I handle the notes no better than any others, but the pauses....Ah! That is where the art resides.'"²⁰ Our first action has to be to pause— to stop everything and simply be.

It is difficult to cordon off one whole day for Sabbath. This is even more challenging when a pastor is attempting to fulfill a full-time calling with a part-time position. Many pastors need to work at some full-time occupation to support their calling to part-time ministry. How can it all fit in? Marva Dawn reminds us that Sabbath-keeping is much more than rest. She writes, "During the times I am not able to do very much, I forget that more important things are happening in me as God works to change my character and transform me into his likeness."²¹ The results of sanctification are much

¹⁹ Exodus 20:8-11.

²⁰ Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 81.

²¹ Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 19.

more fruitful than anyone's best efforts at serving God in every minute of the week. Not only do pastors see their own spiritual lives enhanced by their Sabbath-keeping, their parishioners benefit from their pastor's growth as well. The spiritual growth of a congregation is fostered through the example of their pastor and through their pastor's spiritual maturity more than any amount of direct ministry on the pastor's part.

Sabbath-keeping looks different for each person and that is as it should be. The way it is kept, the timing of it within a week, the very nature of the time with God, is part of the crafting of the time. The key to this time, however it is crafted, is to stop normal activity and be with God. Allowing the space to exist opens up the soul to listen to God, to reflect on all that God brings to mind, and to allow God to be God. Dorothy C. Bass calls this opening the gift of time so one might receive the day. She asserts that God shows this pattern within the Creation events.²² Certainly, God modeled this as God paused not only on the seventh day, but at the end of each day as God reflected on the goodness of each day's work.

Developing a Rule of Life is an opportunity for the clergy of the Northern Maine United Methodist Church to look at spiritual practices holistically; not only to teach this way of life to their congregants, but first and foremost to better ground their own relationship with God so that they may live a more satisfying and fruitful life as a disciple of Christ. Clergy who follow a Rule of Life are blessed in their walk with the Lord and therefore more able to shepherd the people whom they are called to serve. Drawing upon the example of Jesus, who walked with his disciples for three years – living communally, sharing his faith, modeling connection to God the Father – pastors can live a life that is more balanced and spiritually fruitful.

²² Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day; Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 4.

While Sabbath-keeping is critical to developing a healthy soul and a balanced life, it is only the beginning. In fact, regular Sabbath observance whets the appetite for a deeper walk with God and fosters the recognition that more can be obtained.

Spiritual Friendships and Spiritual Direction

One of the ways that we find more of God is through the relationships we have with other Christians, especially other Christians who are also searching for a deeper relationship with God. Together, we might learn to hear and see God at work within and around us in new ways. Indeed, one of the great mysteries of our age is the profound sense of loneliness many of us feel despite the vast number of ways we have to reach out to God and one another. Paula Huston writes of her experience of finding God in the midst of a Christian community:

The notorious existential loneliness of the contemporary individual cannot withstand such an experience. When “our minds are in harmony with our voices” as Benedict puts it, we are no longer thinking and behaving as isolated selves, but have found our place in the Whole. When we do, we see what is normally hidden: we are not alone at all, but in joining worshipfully together with our fellow human beings; we have become the very dwelling place of God.²³

This type of experience may happen in worship or happen in special spiritual friendships or a more formal relationship called spiritual direction.

Leslie Hay evokes the image of hospitality when she writes about how we partner together to offer a space to invite God and each other into. She speaks of Benedictine hospitality and its impact on monastics and others who grace that space. “St. Benedict desired most of all to create a safe place where his monks could come together to live in community respectful of individuals as each journeys toward union with God devoid of

²³ Paula Huston, *The Holy Way: Practices For a Simple Life* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2003), 146.

anything harsh or burdensome.”²⁴ Within a spiritual friendship or spiritual direction, individuals find a holy space to listen to God together. There is something profound about being in community, just as the Trinity models for us. Alice Fryling states, “Loneliness is the first thing which God’s eye named, ‘not good.’ God knew that human beings needed human companionship.”²⁵ Within this special relationship, participants may find themselves closer to God and to each other.

There are various models for such a relationship. Christian friends can plan intentional meetings to allow each person to speak and each to listen. Groups may come together for group direction; again, each taking turns in both roles. Formal relationships between spiritual directors and individuals may also be the norm. Each person praying for each other, each listening for the voice of God in their midst, each offering a sacred space for God to enter in and for perceptive hearers to notice. Within this crucible, spiritual formation is taking place. Nouwen asserts, “Spiritual guidance affirms the basic quest for meaning. It calls for the creation of space in which the validity of the questions does not depend on the availability of answers but on the questions’ capacity to open us to new perspectives and horizons.”²⁶ This is church at its best.

Wesley believed in communal spiritual direction just as his own mother had taught him and his siblings. W. Paul Jones writes, “The Wesleyan approach to direction has three foci: growth in grace, as the goal of Christian existence; corporate spiritual direction as a central means for such growth; and the church’s means of grace as primary

²⁴ Leslie A. Hay, *Hospitality: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2006), 6.

²⁵ Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 15.

²⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 9.

resources for this pilgrimage.”²⁷ For Wesley, spiritual direction was so important he refused to allow his clergy to preach anywhere where there was not capacity for this group direction to take place.

In the end, whatever form of spiritual direction or friendship may be undertaken, Thomas Merton asserts that we be attentive to “the basic attitudes of our soul, our inmost aspirations, our way of meeting difficulties, our mode of responding to good and evil.”²⁸ Merton reminds us that when we are within the Spiritual direction experience, we are “in the presence of a person, an immortal soul, loved by Christ, washed in his Precious Blood, and nourished by the sacrament of Love.”²⁹

Rule of Life

Historically, saints and mystics have found that a regular rhythm of prayer, study, direction and activity enhanced their lives and brought balance and fulfillment. From the beginning they named this type of living a Rule. One does not need to become a monk or a hermit to find a rhythm or Rule that will bring satisfaction in modern life but reflecting on some of the traditional Rules can be great fodder in developing a Rule for today.

In the sixth century, Benedict of Nursia established a Rule of Life for those who were interested in following Jesus with purpose and stability. Benedict called his Rule “a little rule for beginners.”³⁰ Since the Rule was first introduced, millions of religious and

²⁷ W. Paul Jones, *The Art of Spiritual Direction: Giving and Receiving Spiritual Guidance* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002), 76.

²⁸ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2003), 25.

²⁹ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 26.

³⁰ Timothy Fry, ed., *The Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 11.

lay persons have used this Rule to pursue a more focused path in following Christ. While the Rule was instituted for those who would live in monastic communities, much of the spirit of the Rule can be helpful to today's Christian who lives in the world and yet longs for a better way. Macchia writes, "A rule of life allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment."³¹

Wesley is also known for encouraging living a Christian life with intention and purpose. In her book, *One Faithful Promise*, Magrey R. deVega outlines a Wesleyan Covenant Renewal. She writes, "This is our starting point for countering our tendency to keep God at a safe distance until we have a personal need to fulfill. It begins with a refusal to accept for ourselves a bland, diluted and comfortable faith, choosing instead a relationship with Jesus Christ that demands our fullest and utmost surrender."³² While Wesley was a deep theological thinker, he was also firmly grounded and provided his church a methodical and practical outline for how to live out devotion to God, intentional spiritual growth, and outreach to fellow humans. Wesley's approach included not only individual spiritual practices but small group experiences which enhanced each participant's spiritual growth.

Elaine Heath, Dean of Duke Divinity School, is another proponent of living with a Rule of Life. She writes in her book, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, "Ordinary Christians are meant to live a radical life of discipleship that involves not just what we believe intellectually, but how we practice prayer, hospitality and justice."³³ She goes on

³¹ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule Of Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 14.

³² Magrey R. deVega, *One Faithful Promise* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 9.

to write, “Having the rule, using it, and being accountable is one of the surest ways to move deeper into genuine discipleship.”³⁴

While many throughout Christian tradition and in contemporary Christian communities have brought insight and practical instruction in how to structure and live by a Rule of Life, Saint Benedict is the beginning point in theological understanding and practical implementation of such a lifestyle. It is helpful to look more deeply at a Benedictine Rule of Life as our starting point.

Benedictine Rule of Life

Benedict begins the prologue to his Rule with these words, “This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.”³⁵ Obedience to God through a life of true discipleship is the first and most profound calling in this relationship with God, for Benedict and those who wish to follow his way of life. It may not be surprising that the monks that Benedict first attempted to instruct were so grieved by this difficult and holy lifestyle that they tried to kill him!³⁶ While living a Benedictine Rule of Life is “different from the world’s way, [in that] the love of Christ must come before all else,” it has offered thousands of religious a way of living from AD529 till today.³⁷

³³ Elaine Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 69.

³⁴ Elaine Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional, Monastic, Mainline*, 69.

³⁵ Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 15.

³⁶ Timothy Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 11.

³⁷ Timothy Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 27.

In Stephen Macchia's book entitled *Crafting a Rule of Life*, he asserts that Benedict offers a "way of listening [to God] in a safe, faith-filled community environment" where one can seek God through humility and obedience.³⁸ Macchia writes that for Benedict, "In community, like minded and like hearted believers best learn to practice the disciplines of prayer, healthy relationships and good works."³⁹

A Benedictine Rule of Life clearly outlines in minute detail when and how to pray, how to order community relationships, and what and how work should be undertaken within an order. Benedict states in his Rule, "in drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome" and yet he acknowledges that following a Rule is bound to be difficult at times.⁴⁰ He tells his monks, "Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love."⁴¹

For Benedict, a life of humility is to be sought after. He outlines several steps a monk must follow to this end. Obedience, simplicity, reverence, hard work, right relationships, and silence are all part of achieving the humility that will result in perfect love for God. His Rule states, "Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue."⁴²

³⁸ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 15.

³⁹ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 15.

⁴⁰ Timothy Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 38.

⁴¹ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 19.

⁴² Timothy Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 38.

One of the hallmarks of a Benedictine Rule of Life is following the Daily Office. Benedict's Rule includes eight moments throughout the day to seek God in community prayer, hymns, reciting the psalms and other Biblical readings. This daily office is central to the life of humility of the Benedictines. It keeps the focus on God rather than on more worldly events and experiences and provides the spiritual fuel needed to live a life that is for God rather than for self.

While spiritual practices are the heart of a Benedictine lifestyle, prayer and worship are to be accompanied by manual labor. In Benedict's Rule, there are specific times for work to sustain the community. Each monk is instructed to the work that is needed as Benedict saw "idleness as the enemy of the soul."⁴³ He instructed the brothers not to become "distressed if local conditions or their poverty should force them to do the harvesting themselves. When they live by the labor of their hands, as our fathers and the apostles did, then they are really monks."⁴⁴

What many know Benedictines for today is their practice of hospitality. Benedict believed that guests should be received as if he or she were Christ himself. He stressed that "proper honor must be shown to all, especially to those who share our faith (Gal 6:10) and to pilgrims."⁴⁵ Benedict instructed that guests should be greeted with much love and invited to pray and eat with the brothers and be united in peace. Particular care is given to those who are destitute, in Benedict's Rule, as Christ is particularly received in them.

⁴³ Timothy Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 69.

⁴⁴ Timothy Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 69.

⁴⁵ Timothy Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 73.

Franciscan Rule of Life

Benedict was not the only saint who gave the church a Rule of Life to follow. Another primary source for monastic life and Rule is Saint Francis. Franciscans also follow the Daily Office and live a life of prayer and humility. The Franciscan Rule of Life is based upon the Benedictine Order that came before it, as Saint Francis was enamored with Benedict and his way of life. One of the distinct hallmarks of Franciscans, of course, is their vow of poverty. Francis wrote, “The brothers should appropriate neither house, nor place, nor anything for themselves; and they should go confidently after alms, serving God in poverty and humility, as pilgrims and strangers in this world.”⁴⁶ Francis believed that since Jesus made himself poor for our sake, being poor like Him, is our highest honor. While the Franciscan Rule includes the obligation to work, it allows no money to be received from that labor. Instead, Francis’ Rule requires the disposition of all property and replaces it with a life of poverty and the begging of alms. The Franciscan Rule regulates the requirements for preaching to the masses and how to serve the world in mission and ministry.⁴⁷

Of course, Saint Francis is also known for his life of peace. He writes in his Rule, “I counsel, admonish and beg my brothers that, when they travel about the world, they should not be quarrelsome, dispute with words, or criticize others, but rather should be gentle, peaceful and unassuming, courteous and humble, speaking respectfully to all as is fitting.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ordo Fratrum Minorum – Franciscan Friars, “The Rule of Saint Francis,” accessed December 17, 2018. <https://ofm.org/about/rule/>.

⁴⁷ Lawrence S. Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 69.

⁴⁸ Franciscan Friars, “The Rule of Saint Francis.”

Francis' biographer, Donald Spoto, wrote of Francis, "He saw his journey to God as a process, a constant deepening and adjustment of his aspirations, a refinement of his presumptions about what God wanted and a winnowing of his own good intentions. In that regard, his conversion was not the event of a day but the work of a lifetime."⁴⁹ Surely, any Rule would emulate this sentiment.

Wesleyan Rules

For most laity and Protestant clergy, living in a monastic order is not the calling that God has ordained. And yet living under a Rule of Life is possible. Indeed, in their book, *Longing For Spring*, Heath and Kisker, write, "Time and time again, the church (the people/laity of God) is renewed when members of the body begin to live out examples of simple faithfulness that can be seen and imitated by the world around it."⁵⁰

Methodists benefit from the structured way of life that the founder, John Wesley, and his brother Charles, embodied during their lifetime. Heath and Kisker assert that "the Wesleyan revival owes its depth and longevity to intentional semi-monastic community adapted from both the Anglican religious societies and the Moravians."⁵¹ The Wesleys' father, Samuel, had modeled for his sons the efficacy of religious societies in practicing a life of piety and devotion to God. Charles and John's Holy Club at Epworth continued this practice. Wesley went on to encourage his followers both in England and America to meet in small groups called bands where members would reflect upon and confess their sins to one another as they prayed for each other's deliverance. Larger groups called class

⁴⁹ Donald Spoto, *Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2002), xiii.

⁵⁰ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 23.

⁵¹ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 32.

meetings would gather for fellowship, prayer, and acts of piety and mission. The Wesleyan model followed three simple rules for discipleship. First, do no harm; second, do all the good one can; and lastly, stay in love with God.⁵² Wesley was convinced that souls could not remain connected to God without a communal practice of following these rules with prayer and service.⁵³

Wesley also believed that the community of believers were essential in each member's spiritual maturation. Gordon Smith asserts that Wesley believed that Christians mature through time with the Spirit in prayer and study of the Scriptures in conjunction with other believers. Smith writes,

The church represents not only tradition but also a living community of believers. Wesley assumed that each maturing believer would become part of a band of like-minded believers. Worship, study, prayer and disciplines all took place in these smaller groups. A believer's inner witness was conditioned, shaped, examined and strengthened by fellowship with other Christians. This small group structure provided accountability and encouragement.⁵⁴

The history of the Methodist movement clearly indicates that consistent spiritual disciplines, acts of service, and accountability and fellowship with other disciples was contagious and fruitful. The early Methodist movement exploded both in England and in America, spreading the Gospel far and wide.

Contemporary Methodist Movements

Today's Methodists may have lost some of their spiritual zeal, unfortunately. While small group accountability ministries are still emphasized, fewer Methodist pastors

⁵² Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007).

⁵³ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 34.

⁵⁴ Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer and the Witness of the Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 45.

and laity seem to take part in such discipleship opportunities. The vows that pastors take upon their ordination demand that pastors live with the highest ideals for Christian living. The United Methodist Book of Discipline asks ordained ministers to answer the following question at their ordination:

For the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness to the Christian gospel and in consideration of your influence as an ordained minister, are you willing to make a complete dedication of yourself to the highest ideals of the Christian life; and to this end will you agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to physical health, intentional development, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, integrity in all personal relationship, social responsibility, and growth in grace and the knowledge and love of God?⁵⁵

If pastors are to take this vow seriously, it takes more than personal devotion to achieve— it takes the fellowship and encouragement of others who are striving for the same ideal. The United Methodist Book of Discipline states that all clergy, both ordained and local pastors, shall engage in spiritual formation and growth in order to lead the church. It says, “These practices embody the Wesleyan emphasis on lifelong growth in faith, fostered by personal spiritual practices and participation in covenant communities.”⁵⁶

Thankfully, there are places that may be found in Methodist circles where these types of groups are ongoing. Three are written about by Heath and Kisker in their book, *Longing For Spring*. The first is seen at Wesley Theological Seminary and can be found in an “old fashioned band meeting that has been in existence for more than six years.”⁵⁷ This band of both students and professors meet regularly and use the Wesleyan five

⁵⁵ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 269.

⁵⁶ *The Book of Discipline*, 293.

⁵⁷ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 61.

questions of accountability to confess to each other as they hold each other accountable.

These Wesleyan questions form the basis for the group's interaction with one another:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?⁵⁸

Another similar group can be found in the Baltimore-Washington Conference run by Rev. Dennis Dorsch. This group also covenants with one another to daily exercise, Bible reading, journaling, and prayer.⁵⁹ Students at most United Methodist Seminaries also engage in similar types of groups.

The second contemporary Methodist pocket of revival that Heath and Kisker write about is the School for Contemplative Living in New Orleans created by Rayne United Methodist Church and Parker United Methodist Church. These churches have created a place where they offer “daily, weekly, and monthly opportunities to gather in community... as we all seek to learn how to balance the inward journey towards God’s presence with the outward journey into the wild life of service around us.”⁶⁰ This group offers times of communal solitude and inner spiritual disciplines combined with service to the needy in the communities surrounding them. Practical outreach of hospitality and justice ministries are centered in the discipline of prayer. The love of God and neighbor are intertwined intimately at the School for Contemplative Living.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 62.

⁵⁹ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 63.

⁶⁰ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 63.

⁶¹ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 64.

Lastly, Heath has been instrumental in forming New Day– micro-communities of prayer and action. The members of New Day communities are “committed to a Wesleyan vision of holiness that integrates a disciplined life of prayer with prophetic and healing action in the world around us.”⁶² These groups meet both for daily and weekly meals, worship, communion, and service. Some of the members live together and some come from the surrounding neighborhoods. The members covenant to follow a rule of life that includes, prayer, fasting, hospitality, financial generosity, service to the needy, Sabbath-keeping and acts of justice and peace.⁶³

Rule of Life in the Northern Maine District

Historical and contemporary models of Christian discipleship, both within and outside of United Methodism, clearly show the efficacy of following a Rule of Life. While most pastors are not going to find themselves looking to join a monastic community, living with a Rule of Life is possible. The Rules that Benedict and Francis employed with their communities are not suitable for most non-monastic folk, which leaves the question, what Rule of Life to follow? Within the Northern Maine District, no two pastors are alike. Some are married with children in the home. Some are bi-vocational or retired from their first career. Some are single and in the early years of their ministry. These pastors all live in locations that are primarily rural and often far from other supportive colleagues. The lives of pastors are so unique, it is obvious that no two pastors are going to need the same Rule. Macchia’s *Crafting a Rule of Life* is a practical and helpful guide in devising a Rule that is tailor-made for each person. Macchia asserts,

⁶² Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 65.

⁶³ Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing For Spring*, 68.

“A rule of life allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes, dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment.”⁶⁴ Macchia’s approach to developing a Rule of Life is theologically based and yet practical in nature and since each person devises his or her own Rule, it enhances the ability to follow it. It is a perfect guide for Northern Maine United Methodist pastors who can benefit from a structured Rule, yet allows the flexibility that these independent minded clergy would accept.

A Rule of Life for contemporary folk must be comprehensive. Not only should it meet an individuals’ needs, it should be balanced across the various domains of a person’s life. Macchia looks at five specific areas: time, trust, temple, treasure, and talent.

Time: Spiritual Priorities

A Rule of Life begins with the spiritual life. In monastic settings, we find the day divided between prayer and worship and other more mundane tasks such as work and rest. Busy pastors may feel a slave to their schedules unless they stop and take stock of how they spend their time and prioritize how they want to spend their time. Macchia suggests asking questions such as, “What is your current spiritual practice in relation to prayer? What is your current practice in reflecting on life and ministry? What is the current state of your soul?”⁶⁵ These types of questions are the beginning point in setting priorities and developing a rhythm of attending to God. For Northern Maine pastors, daily prayer, weekly worship, weekly Sabbath, monthly accountability groups, and yearly

⁶⁴ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 14.

⁶⁵ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 89.

retreats might be part of that rhythm. The first step is to stop being beholden to outside influences and remember to give that time back to God and God's direction.

For all Wesleyans, and for United Methodist pastors in particular, remembering John Wesley's third rule – to stay in love with God – is paramount. Bishop Rueben Job reminds us that spiritual disciplines are the ordinances that keep our relationship with God alive. He writes,

Living in the presence of and in harmony with the living God who is made known in Jesus Christ and companions us in the Holy Spirit is to live life from the inside out. It is to find our moral direction, our wisdom, our courage, our strength, to live faithfully from the One who authored us, called us, sustains us, and sends us into the world as witnesses who daily practice the way of living with Jesus.⁶⁶

Trust: Relational Priorities

The next area a Rule should include are the other relationship priorities in our lives. Macchia encourages reflection on which relationships are the most important in one's life and how they may need to be deepened. Are some of these relationships in need of attention? What are some of the joys and challenges in each relationship?⁶⁷ Most pastors have an overabundance of relationships. The task of this reflection is prayerfully to begin to see which relationships need the most attention and which need to be given less. Busy pastors need to be reminded that their families have to take priority. Not only do pastors need to prioritize time with their families, they need to be fully present when they are with them. Kirk Jones reminds us that if we are with our families but thinking or talking about the church, we are not giving our families the care that they deserve. He recounts a story of a young woman whose father was a pastor. She confessed in a

⁶⁶ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules*, 54.

⁶⁷ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 100.

counseling session that she hated the church for taking her father from her and she hated him for letting it.⁶⁸ Pastors who follow the first Wesleyan rule of “Do No Harm” need to begin with their families.

Temple: Physical Priorities

Physical health may be the area of casualty for many pastors. A balanced Rule of Life will include attention to this important area that often receives the least amount of consideration. Kirk Jones writes of a time in his vocation when his normal breakneck pace came to a screeching halt in the middle of a sermon when he found himself physically unable to continue. His exhaustion and physical distress were enough to bring an immediate understanding that he had to take better care of himself.⁶⁹ This could be said for each and every pastor who has ignored their physical health in their zeal for God’s church. Macchia’s focal questions might bring many pastors to a quick realization. When was the last time you went to a doctor or dentist? How are your diet and exercise regimens? What kind of rest are you giving your body? The more telling question that Macchia poses may be the most instructive: “What descriptive words come to mind when you look in the mirror and review with integrity the current state of your physical health and well-being?”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm*, 97.

⁶⁹ Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm*, 10.

⁷⁰ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 102.

Treasure: Financial Priorities

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church states that clergy are required to “teach and model generous Christian giving with a focus on tithing as God’s standard of giving.”⁷¹ Still, many clergy, like the rest of society, struggle with personal money management. United Methodist pastors in Northern Maine are less likely to attend seminary, partly due to the large financial commitment, and those that do tend to have large school loans to pay back and low salaries to compensate for it. It is often very difficult to teach congregants to tithe when clergy are struggling in this area personally. While there are many resources available to both congregants and clergy, the first step is to review faithfully the state of one’s financial stewardship. Macchia poses these types of questions: What words describe the ways you manage money? What financial concerns grip your soul? What would you want to change in your current stewardship of your resources? What do you sense the Lord is inviting you to adopt?⁷²

As clergy begin to see the results of their own stewardship goals coming to fruition, they are more able to help their congregants in this area of life as well. For Northern Maine United Methodist pastors who find themselves needing more assistance in this area, there are resources such as Dave Ramsey’s Financial Peace University, the United Methodist Foundation of New England, as well as the Preacher’s Aide Society. These resources are readily available to help clergy who need guidance in both church stewardship and personal financial management.

⁷¹ *The Book of Discipline*, 225.

⁷² Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 122.

Talent: Missional Priorities

The last area that Macchia focuses on in developing a Rule of Life is missional focus. Most pastors are heavily involved in this area and yet many find themselves going from one situation to another without the guidance from God that could hone their ability to see where their time should best be spent. Macchia encourages prayerful reflection upon where one's current focus is, and where one desires to serve in the future, both in and outside of the church.⁷³ John Wesley encouraged clergy to think of themselves as community pastors. He wrote, "There is scarce any possible way of doing good, for which here is not daily occasions... Here are poor families to be relieved: Here are children to be educated: Here are workhouses, wherein both young and old gladly receive the word of exhortation of all human wants."⁷⁴ There is certainly no limit of places for pastors to reach out with love and the good news. Yet, Jesus modeled a more focused approach to outreach. While Jesus did heal the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28 and other gentiles along the way, he knew that he was sent to the Hebrew people as his primary mission and purpose. He ministered to many but spent the majority of his time with a small group of apostles. With prayer and reflection, clergy are able to discern where their focus should be in each period of their lives and ministry which will enhance their Rule of Life and their satisfaction in life in general.

Wesleyan Accountability Small Groups

No Rule of Life for United Methodists could really be complete without a place for small group involvement. As has been noted previously, Wesley taught his fellow

⁷³ Stephen Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 132.

⁷⁴ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules*, 35.

Christians to meet in small groups – or bands – for worship, study, and prayer. Each believer received and offered accountability and encouragement to the other band members. This small group served as the crucible for spiritual growth and development.⁷⁵ Northern Maine United Methodist pastors are encouraged to be involved in one or more of such groups. Local pastors who have yet to complete their educational requirements are enrolled in a small mentored group with others in that category. Many pastors meet with local ecumenical groups and others meet with United Methodist clergy in a variety of other situations. While the United Methodist Book Of Discipline, ordination vows, and tradition encourage small group involvement, some pastors remain isolated or uninitiated into this type of spiritual discipline. A Rule of Life that encourages group involvement is most helpful.

Conclusion

The call to serve God as a pastor is a sacred call and cannot be achieved without the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. While pastors are equipped by God for this sacred purpose, pastors must remember to be good stewards of their bodies and souls, remembering that they are children of God first and foremost. Pastors are called upon to be good role models to their congregations in living happy, productive, balanced lives that honor God. Clergy can find the spiritual and physical balance they desire by developing and living out a Rule of Life that includes placing God first and clergy self-care in all the other areas of their lives. For United Methodist pastors, this can best be achieved within a setting that includes a traditional Wesleyan small group experience.

⁷⁵ Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus*, 46.

In the next chapter, we will look at a specific project that offered United Methodist clergy in Northern Maine an opportunity to be trained in developing their unique Rule of Life while participating in a Wesleyan band for four weeks.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT AND ANALYSIS

Hypothesis

Pastors in United Methodist Churches in Northern Maine will grow in their spiritual formation if they begin to live a Rule of Life that includes consistent small group support.

Introduction

On January 20, 2018, 47 United Methodist clergy of the Northern Maine District were invited to participate in a day-long Spiritual Retreat. Clergy were invited to spend the day in prayer and worship while learning how to develop and implement a Rule of Life using Stephen Macchia's book *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-ordered Way*.

The Spiritual retreat was carefully planned to provide a safe and welcoming space for clergy to gather, fellowship, and learn a new skill. The setting was a centralized church within the District. Several tables were arranged in the fellowship hall in such a way that clergy would be encouraged to fellowship, share a meal with each other, and share some group experiences which would help set the tone for the small group project that would follow.

Guest presenter Steve Macchia spent the day with these clergy sharing his own experiences and sharing the basics of how to develop a Rule of Life and how to use his book *Crafting a Rule Of Life* that they had all been given. The day began with worship

and included a healthy and tasty meal. Flowers and candles adorned the hall providing a retreat type of feeling to the day.

While Steve shared some of his own experiences of living both without a Rule of Life and with one intact, participants were invited to reflect upon the state of their own souls and satisfaction with the balance of their lifestyles. Table groups were invited at various points of the day to share from their experience with one another, beginning to form a bond of trust and mutual support. Some parts of the learning experience were didactic, and others were achieved by art projects that each group worked on individually and together.

Participants specifically reviewed the first section of Macchia's book. They looked at the various roles and relationships within their lives, the gifts that they enjoyed using, the deepest desires and values of their hearts, their vision for living with purpose, and what they were currently doing to pursue their dreams. All of their reflections would then be used in developing their unique Rule of Life. Macchia offered a rubric which is found at the end of his book as one example of how to write their Rule but also offered additional ideas of how others had formalized their unique Rules. Participants were invited to continue to formulate their Rules in the weeks following the retreat.

At the end of the retreat, clergy were invited to become part of a four-week small group that would encourage and support them in their efforts to live into the Rule that they had developed. Twenty-five clergy attended the retreat and eleven of those clergy chose to take part in the small group experience.

These eleven participants were divided into three small geographical groups which met for four more sessions following the retreat. Each group met with me, their District Superintendent, as they shared their experience of developing and living into their Rule of Life, the current state of their soul, and prayer for one another. The

participants covenanted to pray for each other between meetings and to attend all sessions if at all possible.

All the participants took a survey before the groups began and a post survey following their last session. In addition, participants were contacted twice following the post survey to ascertain anecdotally where they were in their Rule and spiritual life.

Participants and Groupings

Of the eleven participants, four were ordained elders and seven were licensed local pastors. Two of the participants were serving churches in their retirement. Four participants were male, and seven were female. All were between the ages of 40 and 77. Three of the participants were serving in a full-time capacity and eight were serving part-time churches. Three of the pastors had been in ministry for less than five years. One of the eleven was bi-vocational. Three of the eleven were single and three had children still living at home.

While there was much diversity in the characteristics of the participants, the groupings were solely based on geography. Three groups were formed. Group One consisted of three females and one male; one retired female, one female in her first five years of ministry, a male licensed local pastor, and one female ordained elder. Group Two consisted of two females; one a retired, and still serving, ordained elder, and the other a part-time licensed local pastor. Group Three contained three males and two females; one male licensed local pastor with less than five years in service, one male ordained elder, one male licensed local pastor with more than fifteen years of service, one female licensed local pastor with less than five years of service, and one female ordained elder with more than fifteen years of service.

Spiritual Health Survey Questions

Each participant was asked to fill out a survey prior to their beginning the project and following the completion of the project. The survey was developed by this writer using Survey Monkey for a platform. The participants were sent an email invitation which included a link to take the anonymous survey. The invitation was sent prior to the commencement of the project and the post-survey was sent directly following the project completion. The survey included 31 questions. The first eight questions were based on a scale of four choices: not satisfied, moderately satisfied, satisfied, and good. Questions 9 through 18 were multiple choice. Questions 19 through 28 were presented with a sliding bar so that respondents could place their answers anywhere between the beginning and ending points, allowing the answer to be in the form of a percentage. The questions were as follows:

1. In general, how would you rate your current satisfaction with your spiritual life?
2. How would you rate your current intimacy with God?
3. How would you rate your current satisfaction with the depth of your spiritual life?
4. How would you rate your current satisfaction with your relationships with family and friends?
5. How would you rate your satisfaction with your relationships with other clergy/spiritual advisors?
6. In general, how would you rate your overall health?
7. In general, how satisfied are you with your financial life?
8. How would you rate your current satisfaction with your ministry?
9. Over the course of the last four weeks, which spiritual practices have you engaged in? (personal prayer, corporate prayer, Sabbath-keeping, tithing, Bible study, acts of service)

10. . Over the course of the last four weeks, how often have you engaged in spiritual practices?
11. Over the course of the last four weeks, how often have you observed the Sabbath?
12. Over the course of the last four weeks, how often have you spent meaningful time with your family or friends?
13. Over the last four weeks, how often have you engaged in meaningful fellowship with other clergy colleagues/spiritual advisors?
14. Over the course of the last four weeks, how often have you engaged in thirty-minute intervals of physical exercise?
15. Over the course of the last four weeks, how often have you engaged in eating a balanced diet?
16. Over the course of the last four weeks, how often have you gotten seven to nine hours of sleep per night?
17. Over the last four weeks, how often have you engaged in meaningful recreation activities?
18. Over the past four weeks, how often have you engaged in activities that enhance your financial life?
19. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I have a close intimate relationship with God.
20. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I am sure of God's love for me.
21. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I am growing in my spiritual life?
22. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I frequently read the Bible for guidance in my daily decision making.

23. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. My prayer life is highly satisfying.
24. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I am deeply satisfied with my relationships with family and friends.
25. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I enjoy a balanced and healthy lifestyle.
26. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I have one or more spiritual friendships that are mutually edifying.
27. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I am highly satisfied with my ministry.
28. Rate the following with one being low and five being high. I am highly effective in my ministry setting.
29. How would you describe your current spiritual health?
30. What spiritual practices are the most effective and satisfying in your experience?
31. Is small group encouragement and accountability important in your life and ministry?

The post survey included these additional questions:

1. How many of the five sessions did you attend?
2. What was the most meaningful from your experience in this project?
3. What was the least meaningful from this project?

Individual Results of Pre and Post Spiritual Health Survey

Group One

While each individual participant developed their own Rule of Life, each group contributed to the outcomes of the experience. As one might expect, the make-up of each

group was as unique as each participant. Group One was made up of four members and me, as facilitator. We met weekly and the group was very faithful in both meeting consistently and in praying for each other in between group sessions. Over all, this group bonded fairly well and very quickly. While the members were all acquainted with each other prior to the group meetings, they had not previously formed any particular friendships. However, this group became fairly close by the end of the meetings. Overall, the group was fairly honest and transparent with each other. They truly supported one another and were observably having a good time together.

As far as group dynamics were concerned, they tended to share the group time equally with no one participant taking most of the air time. This group voted to continue to meet after the project was over because they enjoyed their meetings and each other very much. After a year, they no longer meet as a group but several of the members continue to support each other outside of the group setting.

Participant A

As the chart in the appendix outlines, Participant A saw some marginal growth from participating in the project, particularly in the areas of spiritual health, balanced lifestyle and prayer life. She stated that she found the group process helpful as it assisted her in being more accountable for her well-being. Participant A indicated that the group process was the most helpful. Before the project began this participant was hesitant about the small group as she reported that developing a trusting relationship within the group was a concern for her. Her reporting indicated that her behaviors during the project had shifted and improved in the areas of Sabbath-keeping, time with loved ones, time with colleagues, exercise, diet, and sleep.

Overall, Participant A experienced a good start to a more balanced lifestyle and a very positive experience of forming trusting relationships within the group process. We see this most strikingly in the quantitative improvement in the area of meaningful experiences with colleagues from none to four times in a month and in her reporting of the benefit of those interactions.

Participant B

The results for Participant B are not clear based on her reporting. This participant had a fairly good experience of the group process as she indicated. She felt that sharing within the group was helpful and that her outlook was expanded through the experience. She most enjoyed hearing and sharing each other's victories and struggles with her group members. Her scores were not valid, however, as she had computer issues and compiled the first set of answers after the project began. For some reason her scoring did not compute properly so the most valuable feedback are her written responses. In conversations following the group experience, Participant B experienced sadness and frustration when the group disbanded. She wished that the other participants had been able to continue to meet longer, as the time together was so valuable to her. Within her Rule of Life, however, she continued to feel positively about her spiritual health and practices.¹

¹ Participant B, personal interview by author, July 16, 2018.

Participant C

Participant C felt her spiritual life was poor before starting the project. She reported that she was not able to lead a group in her church as there was no interest for one among her parishioners. She was not satisfied with her clergy relationships or her current ministry setting. She rated her spiritual friendships at an 8 out of 100 and satisfaction with her ministry at a 26. After taking part in the project, she was satisfied with her clergy relationships and moderately satisfied with her ministry. She reported a 96% satisfaction with clergy relationships and a 50% satisfaction with her ministry at the end of the project. This was a dramatic change. Interestingly, before she began the project, she reported a ministry effectiveness rate of 45 and this dropped to a 31 following the project. This could have been an anomaly, or it could have been the result of some clarity that was imparted during the enhanced spiritual growth during the project. Participant C reported loving the group experience and the support she received through it. Her reporting indicated improved ratings for spiritual depth, family relations, clergy relations, and ministry satisfaction.² While the Rule of Life was a helpful reminder to her to take better care of herself in all areas of life, the group was particularly effective in giving her a lot of support and helping her to be more accountable.

As reported by the participant, the most interesting factor in this experience was the growth in almost all areas of her spiritual health and yet a decrease in her reported ministry effectiveness. As stated previously, this could be an anomaly, however it raises the possibility that spiritual growth includes deeper introspection and a deeper accountability. This writer had not anticipated this possible result and finds it particularly encouraging.

² Participant C, personal interview by author, March 5, 2018.

Participant D

Participant D attended the spiritual retreat and the first small group meeting. He did not complete the group part of the project as he unexpectedly moved to a new church in a different state during this time. Participant D was held in prayer by the rest of the group despite his unexpected departure. Interestingly, this participant was fairly secure in his wellness before the project and according to his reporting that remained despite the upheaval in his life. He reported that he was in multiple group settings and that played a big role in his spiritual health and wellbeing. He reported feeling supported by prayer through the experience even when he was not physically in the group. This participant had the ability to weather some of the storms in ministry with his spiritual health on track. It is clear that being supported by his colleagues within the group setting was a part of that positive outcome.

Most striking in this participant's results may be seen in the changes in his lifestyle and family relationships; going from 75% to 90%. The change in this participant's ministry setting during the project allowed him to move closer to family which was the most influential factor. This participant also indicated that the small group experiences were his greatest growth influences. It is not clear if the short time in the group process was that meaningful or if the other small group experiences contributed as well.

Group Two

Group Two was the smallest group, with two members who met with me weekly for the four sessions. The two participants had not known each other very well prior to the group but both were willing to be open and transparent from the start. At one point mid-way through the project, one of the participants reflected that they had much more in

common than they would have originally guessed. Both bonded fairly well and it was a good group session with mutual support, prayers, and sharing. While this group did not vote to continue to meet following the project, it was more of a geographical and time commitment issue that prevented the group from continuing. This particular group actually met over a six-week interval as weather conditions prevented two sessions from meeting on time.

Participant E

Participant E reported fairly consistent spiritual health before and after the project. The most dramatic changes noted were in the area of spiritual friendships which improved from a 50% to a 100% and in Biblical guidance which decreased from a 94% to a 60%. While scripture reading and reflecting was high on her list before the project, her spiritual practice during the project focused more on spiritual friendships, so this was a shift for her during this particular time. She reported that this area of growth was important to her though she continued her practice of meditation and prayer throughout. While this participant stayed on track in her spiritual health overall, within the group process this participant was able to discern some new direction for her life and ministry. It was clear that the project was helpful to her in making these new changes.

The intriguing questions from this participant's results may be seen in the reporting of going from a satisfied spiritual state to a moderately satisfied spiritual state and going from reporting a close relationship with God to an average relationship with God despite growth in other areas. As reported, this participant used the group process to discern a change needed within her vocational life. Did this change lessen her satisfaction with her relationship with God or was she more in touch with her true spiritual health as a result of her participation in the project? While it is easy to imagine that intimacy with

God results in greater satisfaction, it could be that growing closer to the Divine allows us greater clarity about our true state of being. Both are of value in our spiritual health.

Participant F

Participant F remained fairly consistent before and after the project. The largest differences reported were an improvement in spiritual friendships and physical exercise. This participant reported a significant increase in her use of the Bible for guidance during the project and felt that the interpersonal sharing within the group was the most important to her during the project. This participant had discerned a change in her calling prior to the project and was in a positive place in her ministry life overall. It was interesting to note that her fellow group mentor discerned the same change in her ministry during the group process. The seed of change was already planted but the shared group time gave the seed the soil to grow.

For this participant, her relationships with colleagues improved during the project and notably her personal relationships with loved ones showed a marked improvement as well. This is interesting. Is there a correlation? When one grows in one kind of relationship, is there a cross over in to another area of relationships? When looking at other participants' responses to this question, it is interesting to note that 10 out of 11 participants saw an improvement in their personal relationships. Of the 11 participants, this improvement was only seen in five of the collegial relationships. However, both participants in this group saw improvements in all their relationships measured. Our sample size is not large enough to draw conclusive interpretations. It could be a simple coincidence. It is possible both group members helped influence each other's experience. It is very possible that there is a correlation between one's spiritual health and one's closest relationships. That was certainly the case for this participant.

Group Three

Group Three was the largest group with five participants who met with me weekly. This group had the most variance in attendance with one or more members missing sessions at various times. This group had both men and women in membership, and all were known to each other outside of the group setting. While some of the members seemed to enjoy the group process, others were less positive about it. Clearly, from a facilitator's perspective, this group did not gel as well as the other two. There seemed to be interpersonal dynamics outside of the group that prevented a deep sharing during the meetings and less trust was developed during the four meetings. This group was the most diverse in terms of gender and that played a role in how the participants interacted.

Participant G

The largest growth following the project for Participant G can be seen in spiritual growth, Sabbath-keeping, intimacy with God, and prayer life. Interestingly, following the project, Participant G felt much less satisfied with his time with colleagues. He dropped from 100% to 30% in satisfaction in that area. While this participant reported that the book was the most important part of this project for him, he also reported that the experience helped him to feel that he is not alone. He also reported that his life was less balanced after the project. His reporting indicates that his spiritual time and satisfaction increased while other areas of his life were slightly less focused upon.³

Participant G's results are the most intriguing and mysterious. While this participant reports a 20-point improvement in his intimacy with God, a 42%

³ Participant G, personal interview with author, February 16, 2018.

improvement in his spiritual growth and a 29% improvement in his prayer life, most of his practices decreased, his satisfaction with colleagues dropped 70% and his relationships with his family decreased 22% as well. Through it all, his satisfaction with ministry improved 46%. The results are intriguing. One wonders if there were outside factors that remained unreported that affected this participant's results.

Participant H

Participant H was fairly consistent in the pre and post survey results. He did make some growth in the areas of relationships with colleagues and family. He reported significant spiritual growth and satisfaction in ministry. He reported that the group was less important to him than the intentionality of spiritual disciplines within his Rule. This participant stated that he enjoyed leading groups more than participating in them. In conversation, this participant indicated that he is an introvert by nature and the group process was not his most comfortable way to grow. He also indicated how he was surprised to discover during this project and his reading of Macchia's book that like physical exercise or other habits, spiritual growth occurs with intentional discipline. After a year, he has continued to grow in his intentionality and his spiritual practices.⁴

The most striking factors for this individual's results were his 42% increase in spiritual growth, 24% increase in satisfaction with ministry and 11% increase in family relationships, as opposed to a 14% decrease in balanced lifestyle. As noted in previous respondents' results, it may be that more introspection and more intimacy with God allows one to see more clearly some of the areas of life that are out of balance and how one may need to be more accountable.

⁴ Participant H, phone interview by author, January 4, 2019.

Participant I

Participant I showed significant improvement in many areas of his well-being from before the project and at the completion of it. He reported improvement in intimacy with God, assurance of God's love, spiritual growth, prayer life, Biblical guidance, and relationships. It was noted that this participant had to stop attending the group after the second session, so his growth was mostly based on living out his Rule without the influence of the group, other than the covenanted prayers from group members. While this participant reported much value in being part of a group, his emphasis for this project was upon "reading and reflecting on my personal rule of life and its impact on my everyday life."⁵ For Participant I, the growth of 7% in his intimacy with God, 23% growth in assurance of God's love, 17% improvement in spiritual growth and 16% improvement in prayer life was less influenced by the group process than practicing his Rule of Life on his own.. While it was not within the scope of this project to ascertain which individual facets of the project were more influential to a pastor's overall spiritual health, this participant was well able to maintain his spiritual focus by following the Rule without the influence of the group process. The question arises; was this a factor of his own individual personality or does it say something about the efficacy and importance of the group experience?

⁵ Participant I, personal interview with author, March 5, 2018.

Participant J

Participant J reported that she came into this project feeling “tired” spiritually.⁶ At the conclusion of the project, she reported the state of her soul as “needing refreshment.”⁷ This was marked improvement based on her self-rating. She increased her scores significantly in the areas of intimacy with God, assurance of God’s love, spiritual growth, Biblical guidance, relationships with loved ones, and satisfaction with ministry. For this participant the group process was an important factor in her growth. She stated, “I felt more connected to my colleagues. Praying for them increased my sense of compassion, both for them and myself.”⁸

One area of interest in Participant J’s reports were found in the dissonance between her reporting of 28% improvement in her intimacy with God and 22% improvement in her spiritual growth with her decreased scoring in balanced lifestyle, ministry satisfaction, financial health and spiritual state. Once more, one wonders if increased intimacy with God brings clarity to areas of one’s life that are out of balance. One also wonders if the emphasis on introspection during the project encouraged the participants to become more in touch with the state of their soul. One question that could be further developed would be; how does the group reporting influence the participant’s understanding of their own experience?

⁶ Participant J, personal interview with author, January 16, 2018.

⁷ Participant J, personal interview with author, March 16, 2018.

⁸ Participant J, personal interview with author, March 16, 2018.

Participant K

Participant K reported that the group process was helpful to her as it “keeps life balance in mind” and that she found the support from colleagues the most meaningful to her in this experience.⁹ Yet, this participant reported a decrease in most of the areas surveyed. Particularly remarkable was the significant decrease in her spiritual growth following the project from 81% to 58%. In conversing with her after the project, she indicated that there were ministry issues outside of the project that influenced her responses and that the timing of the project was not as favorable to her as if it had occurred at a different point. Much of the project occurred at the same time as this participant was experiencing a particularly challenging situation within her ministry setting which diminished her experience.¹⁰

It is noted that this Participant’s spiritual growth decreased by 23% over the course of the project and while she later told me about the changes in her ministry setting that she thought influenced this, she did not disclose this to the group during the meetings. It would be interesting to know how her spiritual growth would have changed over time, if she had felt more comfortable in sharing more completely within the group. As previously noted, this group did not develop the same level of trust that the other two groups did and that had to have been a factor in some of the results seen by the participants.

⁹ Participant K, post survey, February 23, 2018.

¹⁰ Participant K, phone interview by author, January 3, 2019.

Conclusions

As can be seen by the reported results, each participant experienced growth in a variety of areas through their experience of the project. Some of the participants found the spiritual groups to be very effective while others found the intentionality of their Rule and disciplines to be most helpful. Each person's Rule was unique which allowed for each person to focus on areas of growth most important to them at the time of the project.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the long-term conclusions for the eleven participants and their ministries and what these results might mean for future growth within the District and to the greater Christian community. What are the results of each pastor's participation in this project? Did the project impact anyone beyond the individuals who participated?

Chapter Five will also include how I intend on leading my pastors and churches within the District over the next several years as a result of what I learned through this project. One of the consequences that I will highlight is the discontinuance of individual mentoring for local pastors and moving to a group mentoring model. This change flowed both from a practical lack of enough mentors and a belief that the group support that pastors within the project enjoyed would yield similar benefits to these local pastors within the mentoring experience

One of the areas of need within the District is for a more engaged laity. Laity are increasingly being asked to perform aspects of ministry which clergy more traditionally engage in. With smaller and more remote churches, laity are stepping in to perform ministries that require a deep level of spiritual growth. Chapter Five will look more closely at how this project can influence some of those laity.

While the results of the project were positive for the individuals that participated, reflection upon the results can and should inform leadership decisions within the District

and beyond this localized region. Chapter Five will begin this reflection. My prayer is that this reflection will not end with the end of this thesis but that it will inform my ministry for years to come and may be of service to others who come after me.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

—Colossians 2:6-7

Introduction

In July 2016, I was appointed by my Bishop to go into the Northern parts of Maine and serve the 59 United Methodist churches there as their District Superintendent. My overall mission was to help these pastors and churches in their efforts to make disciples of Jesus Christ. I observed in my initial days of this ministry how faithful the pastors were and how isolated many of these small churches were. I could easily discern that these pastors were diligent in serving the people in their communities even when that meant working bi-vocationally, going without financial resources, working into their retirement years, and serving sacrificially.

As I reflected on the life of the pastors under my care, I was concerned for their wellbeing – emotionally, physically and spiritually. While each pastor knew the value of prayer, taking time for family and rest, and leading healthy, balanced lifestyles, I was not convinced that they were actually practicing what they preached. Indeed, I often needed reminding myself.

As I began to study and practice living with a Rule of Life for myself, I wanted to share this kind of practice with these pastors. My experience showed that my growth occurred best when I was surrounded by supportive colleagues who nurtured me and held me accountable for my choices. Gentle reminders and offers of help and encouragement

made the world of difference and this small group experience resonated with our Wesleyan heritage.

In January 2018, I invited the pastors within my District to participate in the study that has been written about in Chapter Four. Clearly, this project had short-term gains for each participant. The gains were different for each pastor based upon his or her own unique personality. Some introverts found the small groups to be uncomfortable as Participant H reported. Some pastors found the group work to be the most helpful as the members of Group One and others reported. Some enjoyed developing a Rule as it helped them stay accountable to themselves. Others found a Rule difficult to follow, too constraining. In the end, since each Rule was uniquely developed for each individual, each person could choose where to place his or her energies and attention.

My hypothesis before the project began was that pastors who followed a Rule of Life that included Wesleyan small group support would grow spiritually and holistically. I surmised that healthy pastors would have more vibrant ministries and I prayed that vibrant ministries would produce more disciples.

One Year Later

As has been previously stated, each of the pastors who participated in the project showed gains in their satisfaction in one or more aspects of their lives at the conclusion of the project and seven of the eleven showed gains in satisfaction within their ministry settings as well.

One year later, most of these pastors have retained their commitment to the practices that they began in 2018. Two of the pastors discerned that they were being called into retirement from pastoral responsibilities and have gone on to serve the church in new ways. The experience during the project helped one of these pastors to hear God

in this discernment time and the small group was instrumental in her discernment. Two of the pastors who participated were given new ministries outside of the District and are serving new churches in other states. Two of the participants formed a team ministry within the District and are happily serving the same church successfully. One of the participants has gone on to lead a small group of pastors within the District as a mentor. While the groups established for the project are no longer meeting, most of the participants are involved in some small group in other settings.

While it is too early to see if the churches that these pastors served are affected by the growth of their pastors, I believe that the long-term results will be positive, both church-wide and District-wide. In the months to come, we will see the first statistical reports that these churches send in once each year and may begin to see trends. In the meantime, I will continue to support these pastors in their overall health and wellbeing.

District Changes

Before this project, all of the District local pastors who had not completed their educational requirements were assigned individual mentoring with another more experienced pastor. While many of the local pastors enjoyed this mentoring, some felt it was just a requirement that had to be completed. Some pastors resisted this mentoring and did not attend at all. With the increase in new local pastors over the last year, I was left wondering who I could ask to be mentors. It seemed that there was more need than supply. Within our District Committee on Ministry, we could clearly see the positive results for pastors who participated in mentoring, which is a requirement in the early years of ministry, and those who did not. Furthermore, we could see the negative results for those pastors who were isolated from their peers and needed some training and

encouragement. From an administrative point of view, I could also clearly see that local pastors who did not receive enough support were burning out and leaving the ministry.

In reflecting on the outcomes from this project, I saw clearly that the small group experience served as a powerful tool in supporting, encouraging, and convicting individuals in their faith walk. I observed that when colleagues shared from their own experience, there was an egalitarian understanding that we are not alone— we are in this together. The participants in the project not only shared their experiences, they learned from one another, and their support and questions led to growth both for themselves and for the other participants gathered in the group. I decided that this model would work well in the required mentoring experience that the newest and least theologically educated pastors were required to receive. While these mentoring experiences needed to include theological reflection on the practice of ministry, supporting one another in one's spiritual life is, of course, endemic to this group experience.

Bringing this change to the District was not met with unilateral applause. It was a new change and some of those who had experienced one-on-one mentoring were resistant at first. However, I was able to choose my best mentors, one of whom was a participant of the project, to take on this ministry and I was able to train these mentors in how to conduct the mentoring, what to cover, and how to support pastoral growth. Several months later, these pastors are reporting growth that is beyond the results that we saw in the one-on-one mentoring for most pastors.

The feedback that I am hearing in the first few months of this change is encouraging. I have heard from one mentor that the depth of spiritual sharing has often brought her group to tears. The group members and the mentor feel much more connected to one another and are growing as a result of their sharing and commitment to each other.

I often see emails that go between the mentors and the local pastors. There seems to be a collegiality that was not there in the past. At times, a mentor will share with me a need for prayer for one of the group members who is struggling with some issue or concern. I have seen mentors reach out on a weekly basis as they pray and encourage their group members and I have seen some of the interaction of support and encouragement that goes on between group members. Even for the pastors who were at first resistant, I am seeing satisfaction and growth within the new mentoring groups. Long term, I believe this change will result in less clergy burn out and more healthy and happy pastors.

While the District is only a few months into this experiment, I am feeling optimistic that it is beginning to make a positive difference for those involved. I look forward to seeing if it has long-term positive outcomes as well. My guess is that it will help pastors feel less isolated, more supported, and more encouraged to live a more balanced lifestyle and experience less burnout in ministry. While these mentoring groups do not follow the Rule of Life groups specifically, all of the mentors attended the January 2018 spiritual retreat and one of them participated in the project itself. Additionally, I trained these mentors before they began their mentoring ministry, so they were well prepared.

Today, as I reflect, 25 pastors received training on crafting a Rule of Life. Eleven pastors participated in the project. Twenty pastors are currently involved in the group mentoring experience. The majority of the pastors in the District have been directly or indirectly affected by this project and its benefits.

Future Directions within the District

One of the goals of the District Lay Leadership team for Northern Maine is to inspire the laity to be more deeply spiritual and impassioned in their Christian expression. The lay leaders have met for many months trying to discern how this goal might be accomplished. There is agreement that, in our District, strong lay leadership is essential. Our early Methodist roots remind us of circuit riding clergy who would come into town once a quarter to preach, celebrate the Eucharist, baptize new members, and organize churches. During the months between visits, it was the laity who were charged with maintaining the structure of the church, leading worship, and encouraging the spiritual growth of the members.

As I think about the positive results of the Rule of Life groups for clergy, I am left pondering the efficacy of inviting laity to participate in a similar group process. This District has a past history of breaking into cluster groups, for both clergy and laity, to join together for periodic worship, projects, fellowship, and training. Within the District, this model has fallen out of favor for several of the cluster groups. However, there are a few areas that have existing and successful groups. I will begin to have conversations with my three District lay leaders who could be instrumental in participating and even leading in laity Rule of Life groups within their areas.

Beyond the District

As I continue to reflect upon the results of the project, I have already begun to use what I have learned to advance the spiritual health of pastors and laity in multiple areas of our life together. The project was successful. Pastors have grown as a result of developing and following a Rule of Life which included Wesleyan small group support. In my reflection, I have gleaned that this type of experience can be expanded upon to be

used in other Christian settings and in new ways. Just as I have now begun to use this model within clergy mentoring and have imagined using it for laity groups, the greater Christian church can use this model as the basis for their unique needs of increasing either clergy or laity spiritual health and well-being. My Wesleyan focus has led me to think of traditional Wesleyan questions such as:

1. How is it with your soul?
2. Do you know the love of God?
3. What are the fruits of your ministry?
4. Have you participated in a means of grace since we last met?
5. How are you currently serving the poor and the needy?
6. What are your spiritual practices? How often are you engaged in them?
7. Do you have sins to confess?
8. How are you managing your financial life? Are you tithing?
9. Are you a good steward of your time and your body?
10. Does the Bible live in you today?

However, I can imagine small group support that is not based on Wesleyan tradition. Just as the District mentoring groups have a specialized focus on theological reflection on the practice of ministry, other Christian groups may have a unique focus that can be incorporated into the group process. Additional foci can simply be added without detracting from the basic foundation of forming a Rule for living and receiving support for that spiritual life.

Limitations

In my position as District Superintendent, one of my roles is to encourage the clergy and laity that I serve with in their spiritual health. Particularly with the clergy, I

have an ongoing check-in with them regarding this and other areas of their lives and ministry. I take this role very seriously and it is not uncommon for me to inquire about their spiritual practices, Sabbath observance, and other areas that one would find in a Rule of Life. Because of this diligence, on my part, I can offer some of the support that a typical small group would offer its participants. I have seen that the clergy who participated in the Rule of Life groups were able to continue their practices or were more aware when they began to lose track of one or more areas of their Rule partly due to our check-ins. In fact, I have found that I was more honest with my own observances since I was checking in with others. These check-ins are important for most people. If a small group experience is not included or continued, most people are going to need to input some kind of accountability partner or mechanism in order to continue to stay honest and accountable. I could see a Spiritual Director, best friends, life partner, or other fulfilling this role in lieu of a group process.

Conclusion

When I first began to imagine what type of project, I might conduct which would be edifying to my own learning experience, and most importantly helpful to the people I served within my role as District Superintendent, I was not at all clear as to what would be most productive. I knew that I wanted to advance the spiritual lives of those I served, and I knew that I hoped to learn more about how to advance the mission of the Gospel. In my imagination, I longed to see an Acts 2 type of church— one that grew by leaps and bounds as the people were unified in their discipleship lives. I can't yet say that I have seen the numerical growth that my imagination desires, but I can say that I have grown in my discipleship and I have seen clergy under my care grow in theirs.

Further, I believe that the fruit of this project is not completely ripened. I believe that this project will continue to invite spiritual growth in individual lives and throughout the District. For most of us, we will continue to value our own spiritual journey. We will likely be less hesitant about other small group formation experiences since this experience was, overall, positive. I believe that many of us will use what we learned to advance the spiritual lives of others under our care, and I believe that because we ventured out in this journey together, we are more likely to venture out in other ministries that we imagine will bring God to the people.

In true Wesleyan spirit, I can honestly say it is well with my soul today. My prayer is that the results of this project will be one small advance in bringing God's Kingdom here to Earth in our lifetime.

APPENDIX A

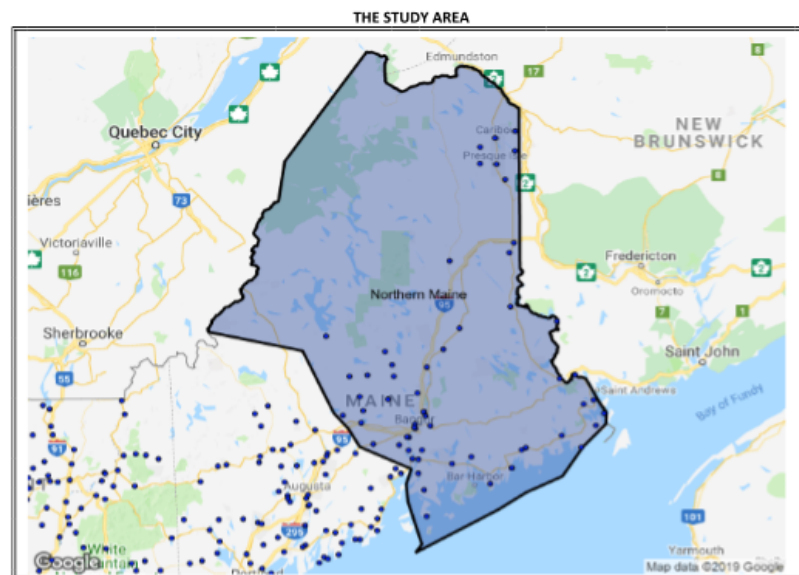
MISSIONINSITE REPORT

The ExecutiveInsite Report

Prepared for: New England Conference UMC
Study area: Geography: Districts - Northern Maine
Base State: MAINE
Current Year Estimate: 2018
5 Year Projection: 2023
Date: 1/5/2019
Semi-Annual Projection: Fall

This ExecutiveInsite Report has been prepared for New England Conference UMC. Its purpose is to "tell the demographic story" of the defined geographic study area. ExecutiveInsite integrates narrative analysis with data tables and graphs. Playing on the report name, it includes 12 "Insites" into the study area's story. It includes both demographic and beliefs and practices data.

ExecutiveInsite is intended to give an overview analysis of the defined geographic study area. A defined study area can be a region, a zip code, a county or some custom defined geographic area such as a radius or a user defined polygon. The area of study is displayed in the map below.



THE 12 INSITES	
INSITE	PAGE
Insite #1: Population, Household Trends	2
Insite #2: Racial/Ethnic Trends	3
Insite #3: Age Trends	4
Insite #4: School Aged Children Trends	6
Insite #5: Household Income Trends	7
Insite #6: Households and Children Trends	9
Insite #7: Marital Status Trends	10
Insite #8: Adult Educational Attainment	11
Insite #9: Employment and Occupations	12
Insite #10: Mosaic Household Types	13
Insite #11: Generations	14
Insite #12: Religious Program Or Ministry Preferences	15

More Information

Please refer to the last page of the report for additional notes and interpretation aides in reading the report.

Not all of the demographic variables available in the MI System are found in this report. The FullInsite Report will give a more comprehensive view of an area's demographics.

Also, the Impressions Report adds additional social, behavioral views and the Quad Report provides a detailed view of religious preferences, practices and beliefs.

INSITE #1: POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD TRENDS

Population:

The estimated 2018 population within the study area is 351,877. The 2023 projection would see the area decline by -2,376 to a total population of 349,501. The population within the study area is growing somewhat slower than the statewide growth rate. While the study area is projected to decline by -0.7% in the next five years, the state is projected to remain stable at 0.0%. The study area's estimated average change rate is -0.1%.

Population Per Household

Population per Household: The relationship between population and households provides a hint about how the community is changing. When population grows faster than households, it suggests an increase in the persons per household. This can only happen when more persons are added either by birth or other process such as young adults in multiple roommate households or young adults returning to live with parents. In some communities this can occur when multiple families live in the same dwelling unit.

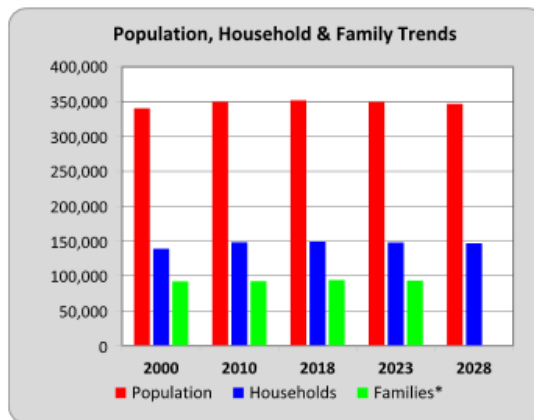
Households:

The households within the community are declining faster than the population, thus the average population per household in 2010 was 2.36 but by 2023 it is projected to be 2.36. Compare this to the statewide average which for the current year is estimated at 2.38 persons per household.

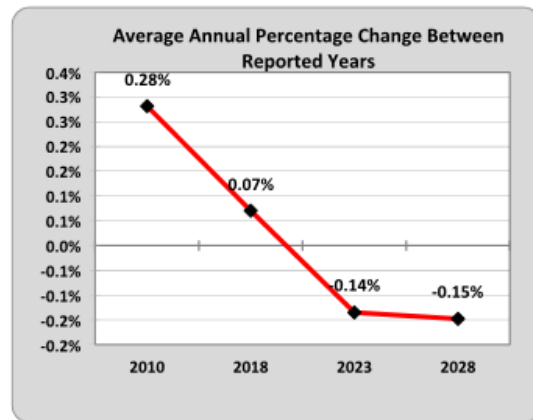
Family Households:

Family households provide an additional hint about the changing dynamics of a community. If family household growth follows population growth, then it would be reasonable to assume that the increasing population per household comes from additional children. However, within the study area, this is not the case. Family households are not growing as fast as the population, suggesting the growth may be the result of growth of non-family adult households.

Population/Households & Family Trends	2000	2010	2018	2023	2028
Population	340,321	349,902	351,877	349,501	346,917
Population Change		9,581	1,975	-2,376	-2,584
Percent Change		2.8%	0.6%	-0.7%	-0.7%
Households	139,035	148,253	149,063	147,924	146,730
Households Change		9,218	810	-1,139	-1,194
Percent Change		6.6%	0.5%	-0.8%	-0.8%
Population / Households	2.45	2.36	2.36	2.36	2.36
Population / Households Change		-0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00
Percent Change		-3.6%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Families	92,350	92,587	94,137	93,337	
Families Change		237	1,550	-800	
Percent Change		0.3%	1.7%	-0.8%	



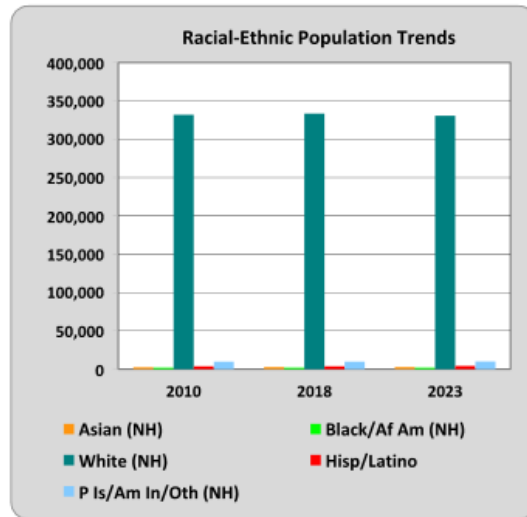
NOTE: Family Household data is not projected out 10 years.



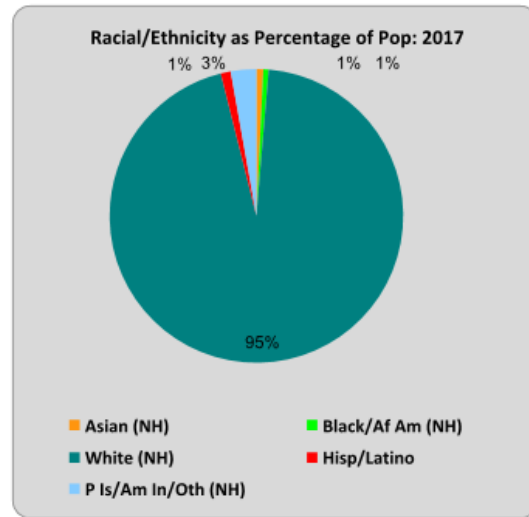
INSITE #2: RACIAL-ETHNIC TRENDS

The US population's racial-ethnic diversity is continually adding new and rich cultural mixes. This data considers the five groups for which trending information is available. Please note that several groups are aggregated into a single category due to their smaller size. Those persons who indicated Hispanic or Latino ethnicity along with a racial category have been separated into a Hispanic or Latino category.

The Population: Racial/Ethnic Trends table provides the actual numbers and percentage of the total population for each of the five racial/ethnic categories. Pay special attention to the final column on the right. This will quickly indicate the direction of change from the last census to the current five year projection.



The Racial Ethnic Trends graph displays history and projected change by each racial/ethnic group.



This chart shows the percentage of each group for the current year estimate.

The percentage of the population...

Asian (Non-Hisp) is projected to remain about the same over the next five years.

Black/African American (Non-Hisp) is projected to remain about the same over the next five years.

White (Non-Hisp) is projected to remain about the same over the next five years.

Hispanic or Latino is projected to remain about the same over the next five years.

	2010	2018	2023	2010%	2018 %	2023 %	2010 to 2023 %pt Change
Race and Ethnicity							
Asian (NH)	2,547	2,632	2,748	0.73%	0.75%	0.79%	0.06%
Black/Afr Amer (NH)	1,994	2,078	2,089	0.57%	0.59%	0.60%	0.03%
White (NH)	331,893	333,411	330,511	94.85%	94.75%	94.57%	-0.29%
Hispanic/Latino	3,684	3,865	4,182	1.05%	1.10%	1.20%	0.14%
P Is/Am In/Oth (NH)	9,783	9,891	9,972	2.80%	2.81%	2.85%	0.06%
Totals:	349,901	351,877	349,502				

INSITE #3: AGE TRENDS

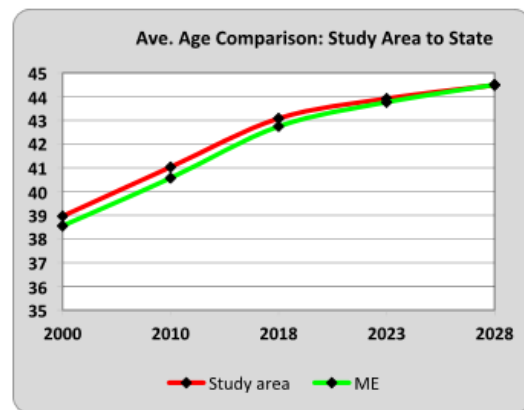
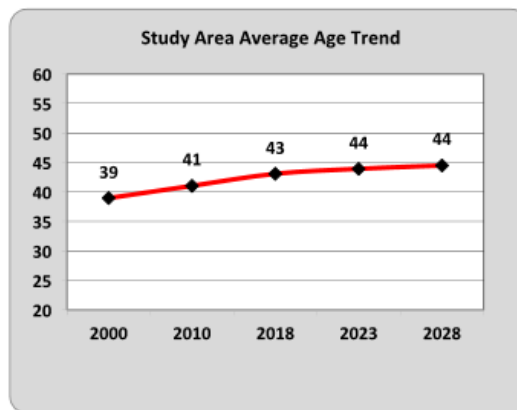
A community's age structure and how it is changing is an important part of its story. Overall, the American Population has been aging as the Baby Boomers progress through each phase of life. This has been abetted by episodes of declining live births. However, this picture may particularize differently from community to community. There are communities in the US where the average age is lower than some others. In other cases, there is a clear shift toward senior years as the Boomers enter their retirement years.

The Age Trend Insite explores two variables: Average age and Phase of Life.

Average Age Trends provides five important snapshots of a community from five data points; the 2000 census, the last census, the current year estimate, the five-year projection and the ten year forecast. These five numbers will indicate the aging direction of a community.

The Phase of Life Trends breaks the population into seven life phases that the population passes through in its life time.

AGE					
Average Age Trends	2000	2010	2018	2023	2028
Average Age: Study Area	38.97	41.04	43.08	43.92	44.49
Percent Change		5.3%	5.0%	1.9%	1.3%
Average Age: ME	38.56	40.57	42.75	43.77	44.50
Percent Change		5.2%	5.4%	2.4%	1.7%
Comparative Index	101	101	101	100	100
Median Age: Study Area	38	42	44	44	44



Summary of Average Age Findings:

The Average Age Trend chart shows both history and projection of the change in average age in the study area. The average age of the study area has been rising for several years. It is projected to rise over the next five years.

A comparison to the average age of the state helps to contextualize the significance of the average age of the study area and its history and projection. In the graph above, the study area and state are laid out side by side. The state's average age is estimated to be about the same as the study area.

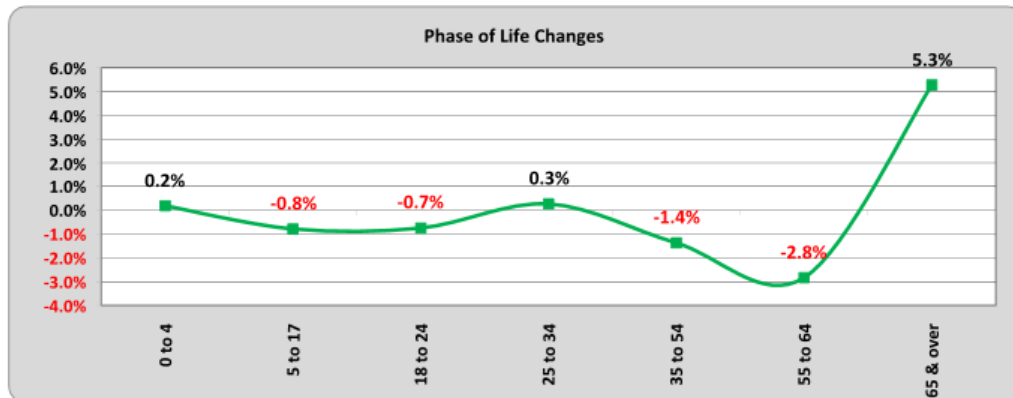
INSITE #3: AGE TRENDS (continued)

PHASE OF LIFE

The Phase of Life analysis provides insight into the age distribution of a population across the different stages of life experience. It can reveal a community in transition.

Pay special attention to the color codes of the Change column (far right below). It will immediately indicate which phases are increasing or decreasing as a percentage of the population.

Phase of Life	2010	2018	2023	2028	2010%	2018%	2023%	2028%	Estimated 10 Year %pt Change 2018 - 2028
Before Formal Schooling Ages 0 to 4	17,503	16,352	16,425	16,791	5.0%	4.6%	4.7%	4.8%	0.2%
Required Formal Schooling Ages 5 to 17	51,249	46,154	43,879	42,781	14.6%	13.1%	12.6%	12.3%	-0.8%
College/Career Starts Ages 18 to 24	35,038	36,925	35,205	33,817	10.0%	10.5%	10.1%	9.7%	-0.7%
Singles & Young Families Ages 25 to 34	36,552	40,502	42,036	40,870	10.4%	11.5%	12.0%	11.8%	0.3%
Families & Empty Nesters Ages 35 to 54	98,822	83,046	77,255	77,114	28.2%	23.6%	22.1%	22.2%	-1.4%
Enrichment Years Sing/Couples Ages 55 to 64	51,946	55,377	51,471	44,759	14.8%	15.7%	14.7%	12.9%	-2.8%
Retirement Opportunities Age 65 and over	58,791	73,522	83,231	90,785	16.8%	20.9%	23.8%	26.2%	5.3%



Summary of Phase of Life Findings:

Phase of Life changes reflect the age profile of a community. On average, it takes 2.1 children per woman to replace both mother and father. If the percentage of the population under 20 is declining as a percentage of the total it is likely that the community will see an increase in the more senior aged population possibly due to a decline in birth rates.

In this study area children 17 years of age and younger are declining as a percentage of the total population. Considering the other end of the phases of life, adults 55 years of age and older are increasing as a percentage of the total population.

In summary it may be that the community is aging as children are raised and leave but parents remain.

INSITE #4: SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN TRENDS

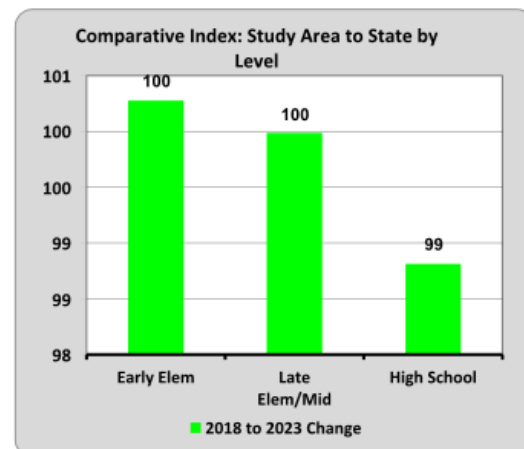
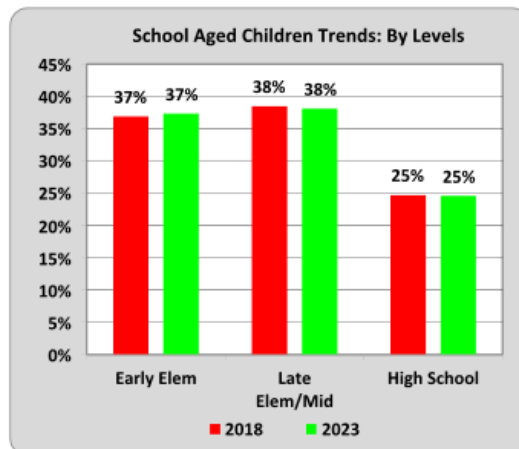
Children are the future! Understanding their specific population dynamics is critical for all planners of social and/or educational services. The "School Aged Children" variable is a subset of the "Required Formal Schooling" segment in the Phase of Life profile. It allows one to zoom in more closely on the children who are of formal schooling age.

The school aged population includes all school aged children including those enrolled in public and private schools, those home schooled and children in institutions.

The School Aged Children variable provides a snapshot of three levels of the population that comprise school age children. The three levels roughly correspond to the following.

- Elementary grades
- Intermediate/Middle School grades
- High School grades

School Aged Children	2010	2018	2023	2010%	2018%	2023%	Estimated 5 Year %pt Change 2018 - 2023
Early Elementary Ages 5 to 9	18,510	17,018	16,375	36.1%	36.9%	37.3%	0.4%
Late Elementary-Middle School Ages 10 to 14	19,461	17,750	16,720	38.0%	38.5%	38.1%	-0.4%
High School Ages 15 to 17	13,278	11,386	10,784	25.9%	24.7%	24.6%	-0.1%



Summary of School Aged Children Findings:

Early Elementary children ages 5 to 9 are projected to increase as a percentage of children between 5 and 17 by 0.4%.

Late Elementary to Middle School aged children ages 10 to 14 are declining as a percentage of children between 5 and 17 by -0.4%.

High School aged children 15 to 17 are declining as a percentage of children between 5 and 17 by -0.1%.

Overall, children are aging through, but there is some evidence of a resurgence of children in the younger years.

INSITE #5: HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY INCOME TRENDS

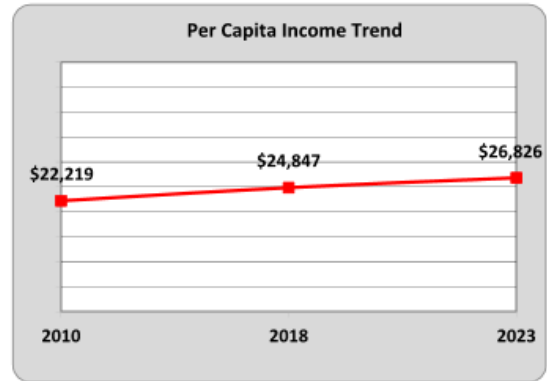
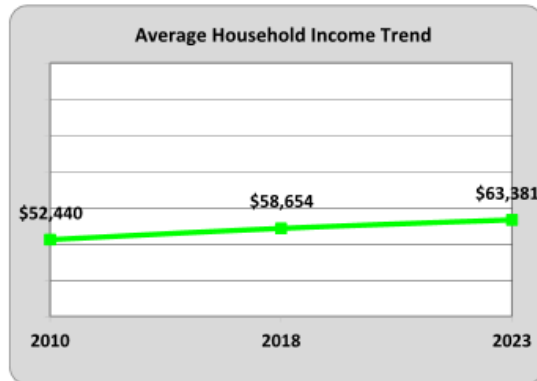
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND PER CAPITA INCOME

Average Household Income and Per Capita Income indicate the level of financial resources within a community. Average Household income reflects the average income for each household, whether family or non-family.

In this study area, the estimated current year average household income is \$58,654. The average household income is projected to grow by 8.1% to \$63,381.

Per Capita Income is a measure of the average income of all persons within a household. For family households, this would include all children. It does not mean that each person actually contributes to the average income from work. It is calculated by dividing the aggregate household income by the population.

The estimated per capita income for the current year is \$24,847. The Per Capita Income is projected to grow by 8.0% to \$26,826.



Income Trends	2010	2018	2023	2010%	2018%	2023%	Estimated 5 Year %pt Change 2018 - 2023
Households							
Less than \$10,000	12,627	12,135	10,562	8.5%	8.1%	7.1%	-1.0%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	11,864	10,243	9,355	8.0%	6.9%	6.3%	-0.5%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	21,496	19,796	18,183	14.5%	13.3%	12.3%	-1.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	18,668	18,037	16,601	12.6%	12.1%	11.2%	-0.9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	23,364	22,010	21,813	15.8%	14.8%	14.7%	0.0%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	28,368	28,592	28,092	19.1%	19.2%	19.0%	-0.2%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	15,764	17,155	17,934	10.6%	11.5%	12.1%	0.6%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	11,027	14,443	16,900	7.4%	9.7%	11.4%	1.7%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2,995	3,913	4,777	2.0%	2.6%	3.2%	0.6%
\$200,000 or more	2,073	2,741	3,707	1.4%	1.8%	2.5%	0.7%
Totals	148,246	149,065	147,924				

Sources: US Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite

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INSITE #5: HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY INCOME TRENDS (continued)

FAMILY INCOME

Family income is a sub-set of household income. It excludes non-family households. Family households include two or more persons who are related and living in the same dwelling unit. Children are more likely to live in family households. Non-family households are households in which two or more persons live in the same dwelling unit but are unrelated.

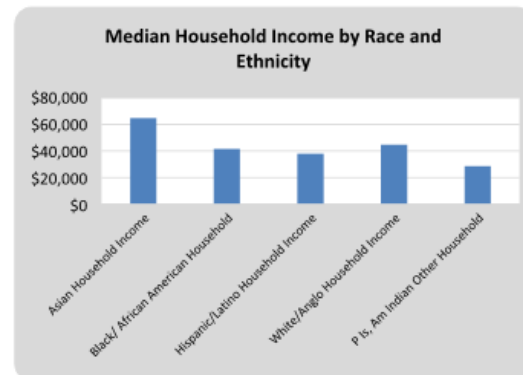
The number of families with annual incomes above \$100,000 is projected to decline over the next five years. For the current year, it is estimated that 19.0% of all family incomes exceed \$100,000 per year. In five years that number is projected to be 18.6%.

Income Trends	2018	2023	2018%	2023%	Estimated 5 Year %pt Change 2018 - 2023
Families					
Less than \$10,000	4,337	4,162	4.6%	4.5%	-0.15%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	3,352	3,156	3.6%	3.4%	-0.18%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	8,909	8,662	9.5%	9.3%	-0.18%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	10,395	11,580	11.0%	12.4%	1.36%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	14,285	14,016	15.2%	15.0%	-0.16%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	20,757	20,421	22.0%	21.9%	-0.17%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	14,207	13,935	15.1%	14.9%	-0.16%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	12,171	11,936	12.9%	12.8%	-0.14%
\$150,000-\$199,999	3,364	3,224	3.6%	3.5%	-0.12%
\$200,000 or more	2,360	2,245	2.5%	2.4%	-0.10%
Totals	94,137	93,337			

MEDIAN INCOME BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

Median income by race and ethnicity is a subset of household income. Median income is that point where there are as many households with incomes greater than the median as there are households with incomes less than the median.

Median Income by Race and Ethnicity	2018
Asian Household Income	\$64,727
Black/ African American Household Income	\$41,640
Hispanic/Latino Household Income	\$37,992
White/Anglo Household Income	\$44,706
P Is, Am Indian Other Household Income	\$28,576
Average	\$43,528



INSITE #6: HOUSEHOLDS AND CHILDREN TRENDS

Diversity of child rearing environments is increasing along with the many other types of growing diversity in the US. To understand this, we begin with the types of households that exist in a community. There are...

- family households with children under 18
- family households without children under 18

The concern of this analysis is family households with children under 18. Of the types of family households with children there are...

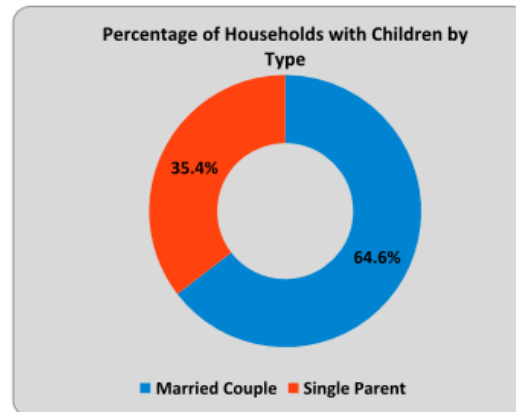
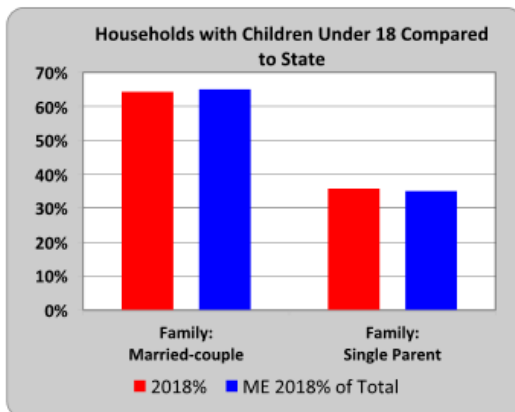
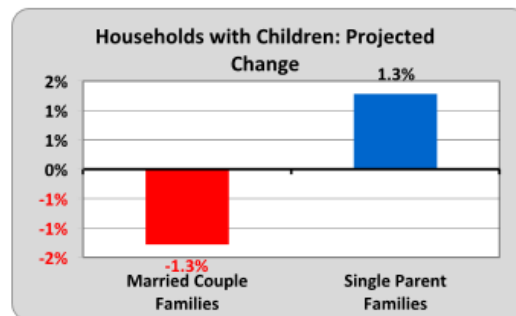
- Married couple families
- Single parent families (father or mother)

These two are reported for the study area in the table below.

Households	2010	2018	2023	2010%	2018%	2023%	Estimated 5 Year %pt Change 2018 - 2023
Households with Children under 18							
Married Couple	24,637	21,790	20,512	64.2%	64.6%	63.3%	-1.3%
Single Parent	13,714	11,953	11,895	35.8%	35.4%	36.7%	1.3%

Of the households with children under 18, married couple households are decreasing as a percentage while single parent households are increasing. The graph to the right illustrates this. Bars above the 0% point indicate a family type that is increasing while bars below 0% is decreasing. This provides "insite" into how family households and structures with children are changing in the study area.

A comparison to the state reveals to what extent this community is similar or dissimilar to the state as a whole. The study area's married couple households with children are similar to the state's profile. The percentage of single parent households with children is about the same as the state.



INSITE #7: MARITAL STATUS TRENDS

MARITAL STATUS BY TYPE

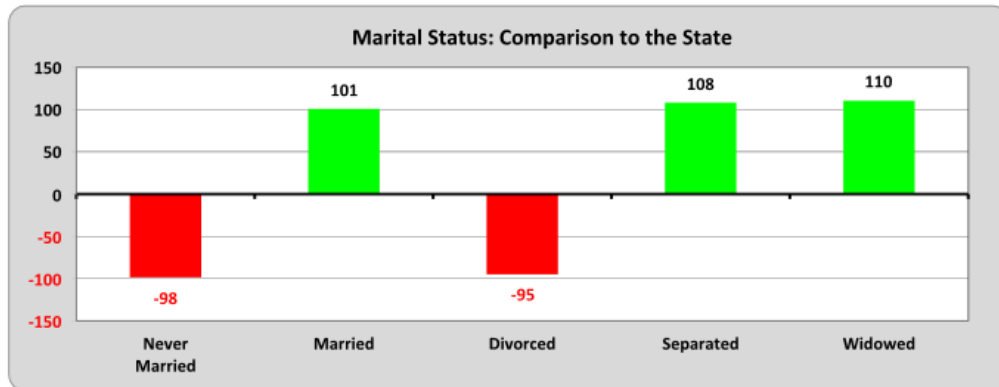
Population by Marital Status considers the number and percentage of persons 15 years of age and greater by their current marital status. Trend information as well as a comparison to the study area's state marital status types provide two different views of this social reality.

Marital types reported include..

- Never Married (Singles)
- Currently Married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed

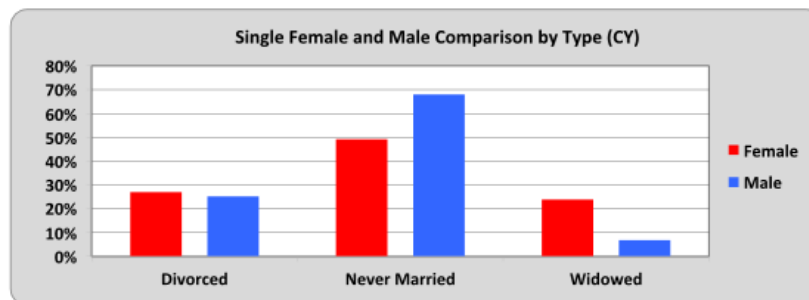
	2010	2018	2023	2010%	2018%	2023%	2010 to 2023 %pt Change
Population by Marital Status: Age 15+							
Never Married	75,989	81,038	82,346	25.5%	26.6%	27.1%	1.7%
Married	162,436	160,811	159,496	54.4%	52.8%	52.6%	-1.9%
Divorced	34,827	36,573	36,178	11.7%	12.0%	11.9%	0.2%
Separated	3,831	3,719	3,528	1.3%	1.2%	1.2%	-0.1%
Widowed	21,274	22,287	21,916	7.1%	7.3%	7.2%	0.1%

In this community, the current year estimate of marital status reveals a community of adults more likely to be married than the state average for adults. The percentage single never married is lower than the state average for adults 15 years and older. Divorce is less prevalent than the state wide average.



Women 15 years and older are more likely to be divorced than men.

Women 15 years and older are more likely to be widowed than men.



Sources: US Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite

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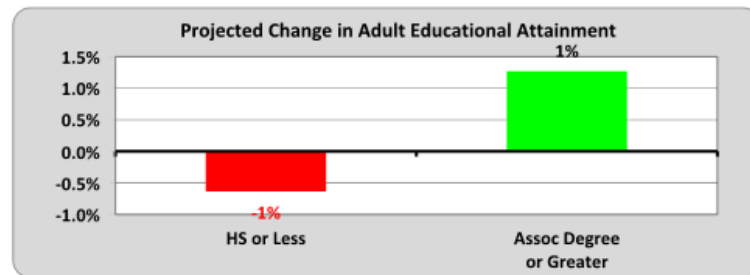
INSITE #8: ADULT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The level of educational attainment of a community's adult population is an important indicator of its opportunities and challenges. This analysis will look at the Adult Educational Attainment from three perspectives.

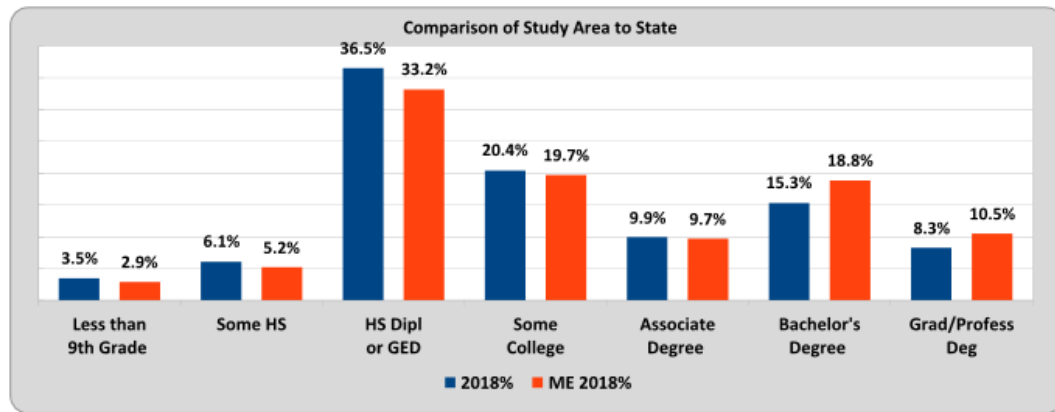
First, it looks to see if the level of educational attainment for adults is rising or not. Second, it compares the level of attainment to that of the state of MAINE. (If this is a state report, the comparison will be to itself.) Finally, the table provides the percentages from 2010.

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL ATTAINMENT CHANGE

The educational attainment level of adults has declined over the past few years. It is projected to rise over the next five years by 1.3%.



EDUCATIONAL LEVEL COMPARED TO THE STATE



	2010	2018	2023	ME 2018%	2018 Study Area-State Comp Index
Population by Educational Attainment: 25+					
Less than 9th Grade	4.7%	3.5%	3.2%	2.9%	121
Some HS	7.3%	6.1%	5.7%	5.2%	116
HS Dipl or GED	37.6%	36.5%	35.4%	33.2%	110
Some College	19.7%	20.4%	20.9%	19.7%	104
Associate Degree	8.9%	9.9%	10.5%	9.7%	103
Bachelor's Degree	14.3%	15.3%	15.9%	18.8%	81
Grad/Profess Deg	7.5%	8.3%	8.4%	10.5%	79

The overall educational attainment of the adults in this community is lower than the state.

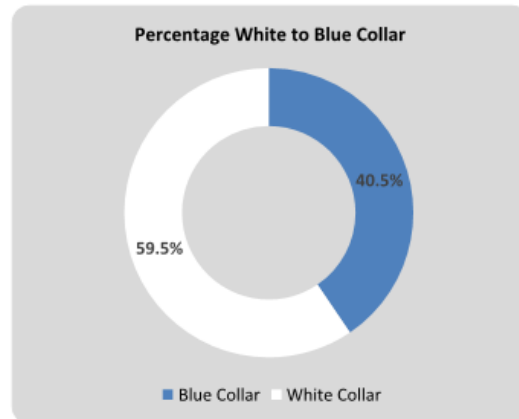
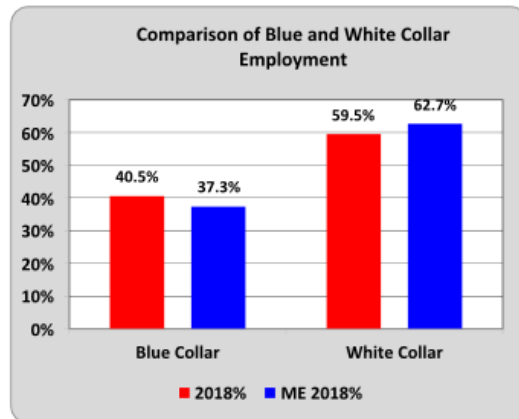
INSITE #9: POPULATION BY EMPLOYMENT

Like educational attainment, an analysis of a community by its employment types and categories provides an important "insite" into its socio-economics. This analysis looks at two factors.

First is a report of the employed population 16 and over by the traditional "blue collar" and "white collar" occupations and compares these to the state. Second, it looks at the community by the seven standard census bureau occupations and compares them to the state.

EMPLOYED POPULATION: BLUE COLLAR OR WHITE COLLAR

On the chart to the left, the study area is compared to the state of MAINE. This study area is close to the state average for White Collar workers. It is close to the state average for Blue Collar workers.



EMPLOYED CIVILIAN POPULATION BY OCCUPATION

	2018	ME 2018	Comp. Index	Interpretation
Employed Civilian Pop 16+ by Occupation				
Bldg Maintenance & Cleaning	3.8%	3.7%	103	At about the state average.
Construction	9.6%	9.1%	105	At about the state average.
Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	2.8%	1.6%	176	Well above the state average.
Food Preparation Serving	5.9%	5.9%	100	At about the state average.
Healthcare Support	3.5%	3.1%	113	Well above the state average.
Managerial Executive	11.2%	13.5%	83	Well below the state average.
Office Admin	12.8%	13.2%	97	At about the state average.
Personal Care	4.1%	3.8%	107	At about the state average.
Production Transportation	12.1%	11.4%	106	At about the state average.
Prof Specialty	21.7%	22.4%	97	At about the state average.
Protective	2.1%	1.7%	125	Well above the state average.
Sales	10.2%	10.4%	98	At about the state average.

INSITE #10: MOSAIC Segments

Mosaic is a geo-demographic segmentation system developed by and for marketers. Instead of looking at individual demographic variables, a segmentation system clusters households into groups with multiple common characteristics. Demographic variables that generally cluster together would include income, educational levels, presence of children and occupations among others.

This database is developed by Experian. Some find the information helpful because it presents a multi-dimensional view of a community.

In the report below, the top 15 Mosaic Segments of the study area are provided. (If less than 15, rows will be blank.)

NOTE: For a full description please see the DI Demographic Segment Guide (Mosaic) under the Help menu on the Documents gallery.

	2018	2018%	State %	Comp Index	Relative to the ME State Ave.
Mosaic Segments					
L43 Blue Sky Boomers - Homemade Happiness	23,378	15.7%	7.1%	221	Well above the state average
Q64 Golden Year Guardians - Town Elders	18,576	12.5%	8.1%	153	Well above the state average
E21 Thriving Boomers - Unspoiled Splendor	12,260	8.2%	10.4%	79	Somewhat below the state average
N46 Pastoral Pride - True Grit Americans	11,623	7.8%	3.5%	225	Well above the state average
J35 Autumn Years - Rural Escape	9,886	6.6%	4.4%	151	Well above the state average
O51 Singles and Starters - Digital Dependents	7,839	5.3%	5.6%	94	Somewhat below the state average
K40 Significant Singles - Bohemian Groove	7,256	4.9%	5.6%	87	Somewhat below the state average
M44 Families in Motion - Red, White and Bluegrass	5,093	3.4%	2.0%	174	Well above the state average
Q65 Golden Year Guardians - Senior Discounts	4,146	2.8%	2.5%	112	Somewhat above the state average
L42 Blue Sky Boomers - Rooted Flower Power	3,539	2.4%	2.8%	84	Somewhat below the state average
S68 Economic Challenges - Small Town Shallow Pockets	3,538	2.4%	1.4%	168	Well above the state average
J36 Autumn Years - Settled and Sensible	3,510	2.4%	1.5%	161	Well above the state average
I30 Family Union - Stockcars and State Parks	3,313	2.2%	3.3%	68	Somewhat below the state average
J34 Autumn Years - Aging in Place	3,228	2.2%	2.8%	77	Somewhat below the state average
C11 Booming with Confidence - Aging of Aquarius	2,738	1.8%	4.4%	41	Well below the state average

Learn about your Mosaic Households

To access Mosaic Portrait data click on:

[Mosaic USA E-Handbook by Experian](#) (To open in a new Tab hold Control key when you click on the link)
Handbook includes Mosaic Overview and two graphic pages for each of the 19 Groups and 71 Segments.

For faith based clients, to access the Mosaic application guide click on:

[Mission Impact Mosaic Application Guide by Bandy](#) (To open in a new Tab hold Control key when you click on the link)

INSITE #11: GENERATIONS

A powerful way to envision demographics is by following a generation through its phases of life. This is because there are, in a general sense, common life experiences at each phase of life. But even more interesting is to understand a generational cohort group that has a unique sense of belonging to others born and coming of age together. More than mere age bracketing, a generation develops a sense of identity as a group based upon their coming of age experiences—how they were parented and major world defining events, such as 9/11. Using the Strauss and Howe model of generations one is able to see a more three-dimensional view of a generational group, bringing mere age demographics to life.

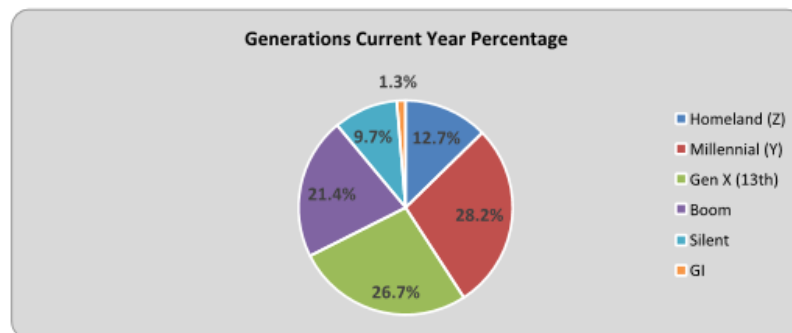
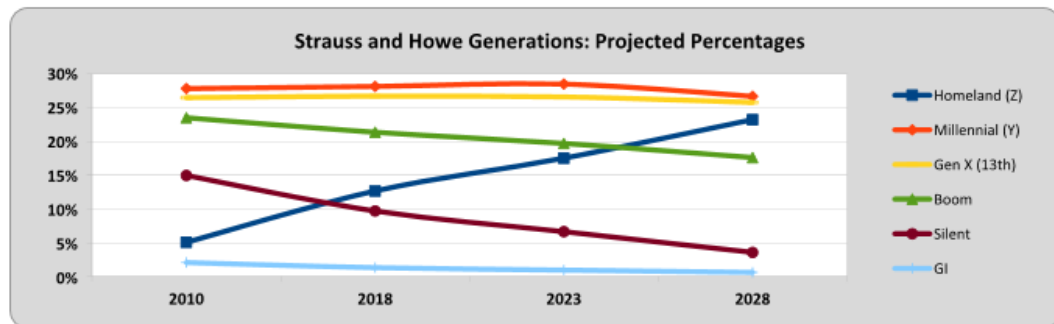
According to the Strauss and Howe model, members of a generation share three qualities. *

- An age location in history
- Some common beliefs and behaviors, including basic attitudes about risk taking, culture and values, civic engagement, and family life
- A common perceived membership in a generation, e.g., Boomers, Gen X, Millennials etc.

(* <http://www.lifecourse.com/about/method/phases.html>)

Name	S & H Type	Initial	Final Birth	2010		2018		2023		2028	
Homeland (Z)	Artist	2005	2025	17,504	5.1%	43,891	12.7%	60,302	17.5%	80,636	23.8%
Millennial (Y)	Hero	1982	2004	95,951	27.8%	97,445	28.2%	98,026	28.5%	92,619	27.4%
Gen X (13th)	Nomad	1961	1981	91,287	26.5%	92,473	26.7%	91,492	26.6%	89,474	26.4%
Boom	Prophet	1946	1960	81,059	23.5%	73,982	21.4%	67,815	19.7%	61,163	18.1%
Silent	Artist	1925	1945	51,620	15.0%	33,624	9.7%	22,881	6.7%	12,452	3.7%
GI	Hero	1901	1924	7,171	2.1%	4,605	1.3%	3,335	1.0%	2,177	0.6%
Totals:				344,592	100.0%	346,020	100%	343,851	100%	338,522	100.0%

For more information on Generational types, [click here](#)



Sources: US Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite

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INSITE #12: RELIGIOUS PROGRAM OR MINISTRY PREFERENCES

This information is from the 2017 Quadrennium Project Survey conducted by MissionInsite of US Religious Preferences, Practices and Beliefs called the Quadrennium Project. The complete survey results are available in the four Predesigned Quad Reports; ReligiousInsite, ReligiousInsite Priorities, MinistryInsite or MinistryInsite Priorities. The Quadrennium White Paper is available on the web site.

	Study Area		US Average		Comparative Index	
	Modestly Important	Very Important	Modestly Important	Very Important	Modestly Important	Very Important
Personal Growth	36.6%	6.2%	33.9%	7.3%	108	85
Addiction support groups	37.4%	6.8%	29.1%	7.7%	129	89
Health/weight loss programs	36.9%	6.4%	34.4%	7.5%	107	86
Practical training seminars	35.4%	5.4%	38.1%	6.7%	93	80
Family Support and Intervention Services	39.9%	8.7%	36.5%	10.5%	109	82
Crisis support groups	37.5%	8.5%	41.9%	10.1%	90	84
Daycare/After-School Programs	25.5%	5.9%	27.2%	7.8%	94	75
Family oriented activities	44.0%	13.9%	42.6%	17.5%	103	79
Marriage enrichment	34.2%	6.3%	36.5%	9.7%	94	66
Parenting development	28.8%	5.7%	30.9%	7.9%	93	71
Personal/family counseling	39.4%	7.8%	40.0%	10.1%	99	77
Community Involvement and Advocacy Programs	53.3%	11.6%	47.7%	13.8%	112	84
Adult social activities	46.1%	11.5%	52.1%	14.4%	88	80
Involvement in social causes	45.2%	12.8%	47.4%	13.6%	95	94
Social justice advocacy work	41.5%	10.4%	40.5%	11.5%	102	90
Opportunities for volunteering in the community	50.9%	13.3%	50.8%	15.8%	100	84
Community Activities or Cultural Programs	46.7%	9.5%	43.3%	12.9%	108	74
Cultural programs (music, drama, art)	40.2%	11.7%	46.5%	11.3%	87	103
Holiday programs/activities	49.5%	13.9%	49.8%	14.5%	99	96
Seniors/retiree activities	45.3%	13.1%	41.9%	13.4%	108	98
Youth social activities	33.6%	8.1%	35.1%	12.3%	96	66
Religious/Spiritual Programs	32.6%	11.5%	37.4%	18.1%	87	64
Bible or Scripture study/prayer groups	38.2%	17.1%	32.6%	15.9%	117	108
Christian education for children	27.8%	11.6%	29.5%	14.9%	94	78
Contemporary worship experiences	40.3%	9.6%	39.1%	11.5%	103	83
Spiritual discussion groups	37.8%	8.4%	39.0%	11.6%	97	73
Traditional worship experiences	37.9%	18.5%	38.9%	20.7%	98	89
Warm and friendly encounters	47.9%	30.3%	45.3%	33.8%	106	89
The quality of sermons	37.5%	24.5%	36.9%	28.5%	102	86

Sources: US Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite

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Supporting Information

Interpreting the Report

The ExecutiveInsite report is designed for easy reading. But there are several tools provided in the tables that make this easier.

Change over time: Several trend tables have a column indicating a change over time. Generally these tables begin with the last census, include the current year estimate, a five year projection and if available, a 10 year forecast. The data in each cell represents a percentage change up or down.

Color Coding: Both the "Change over Time" and "Comparative Indexes" columns are color coded to easily spot any change and the direction of that change.

Change:	Increasing	Stable	Declining
Index:	Above Ave	Ave	Below Ave

Variable Definitions

Full variable definitions can be found in the MI Demographic Reference Guide. Download it free from the Help/Documents menu located on the map screen of your study area on the MissionInsite website.

Indexes: Some variables will have a column called "Comparative Index." An index is an easy way to compare a study area with a larger area. For this report, all comparisons are with the state or states within which the study area falls. The indexes can be interpreted as follows.

- Indexes of 100 mean the study area variable is the same as its base area.
- Indexes greater than 100 mean the study area variable is above the base area. The higher the number, the greater it is above the base.
- Indexes less than 100 mean the study area variable is below the base area. The lower the number, the greater it is below the base.

Support

If you need support with this report, please email MissionInsite at misupport@missioninsite.com.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY RESULTS & OTHER TABLES

Table 1. Wesleyan Small Groups

Group One			
Participant A	Female	Ordained Elder	Age 51
Participant B	Female	Retired Licensed Local Pastor	Age 77
Participant C	Female	Licensed Local Pastor <5yrs	Age 45
Participant D	Male	Licensed Local Pastor	Age 59
Group Two			
Participant E	Female	Retired Ordained Elder	Age 70
Participant F	Female	Licensed Local Pastor	Age 64
Group Three			
Participant G	Male	Licensed Local Pastor	Age 71
Participant H	Male	Licensed Local Pastor	Age 57
Participant I	Male	Ordained Elder	Age 40
Participant J	Female	Licensed Local Pastor <5yrs	Age 57
Participant K	Female	Ordained Elder	Age 56

Table 2. Participant A Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	4 Not Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	3 Average	3 Average
3. Spiritual depth	4 Not Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied

4. Family relationships	3 Moderately Satisfied	2 Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	4 Not Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
6. General health	Good	Good
7. Financial health	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	Sabbath-keeping personal prayer journaling corporate prayer tithing acts of service	Sabbath-keeping personal prayer journaling corporate prayer tithing acts of service Bible study small group
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Weekly	2 or more times a month
11. Sabbath-keeping	Once a month	Twice a month
12. Time with loved ones	Three times a month	Four times a month
13. Time with colleagues	None	Four times a month
14. Time in exercise	None	One to two times a month
15. Balanced diet	One to Two times a week	Three or more times a month
16. Quantity of sleep	One to Two times per week	Three or more times a month
17. Time in recreation	Twice a month	Three or more times a month
18. Financial activities	Once a week	Once a week
19. Rate intimacy with God	56 %	58%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	93%	90%
21. Rate spiritual growth	33%	55%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	44%	43%
23. Rate prayer life	46%	63%

24. Rate relationships with loved ones	71%	75%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	30%	46%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	85%	75%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	75%	74%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	81%	71%
29. Current spiritual health	Not adequate	Getting more healthy
30. Spiritual practices	scripture writing journaling devotional reading scripture reading	scripture journaling discussion
31. Small group satisfaction	Only those I trust	Makes me accountable
32. Number of sessions attended	—	5
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Small Group
34. Least helpful	—	Time of year for group due to weather

Table 3. Participant B Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	2 Close	2 Close
3. Spiritual depth	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
4. Family relationships	1 Very Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	3 Moderately Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
6. General health	Very good	Very good
7. Financial health	1 Very Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied

9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer Lectio Divina Sabbath-keeping tithing small group acts of service	personal prayer corporate prayer Lectio Divina Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study small group acts of service
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Daily	Daily
11. Sabbath-keeping	Once per week	Once per week
12. Time with loved ones	More than four times	More than four times
13. Time with colleagues	Three times	Three times
14. Time in exercise	None	None
15. Balanced diet	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
16. Quantity of sleep	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
17. Time in recreation	Twice in month	Twice in month
18. Financial activities	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
19. Rate intimacy with God	4	83%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	5	100%
21. Rate spiritual growth	4	100%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	5	100%
23. Rate prayer life	4	67%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	4	5
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	4	4
26. Rate spiritual friendships	5	5
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	4	4
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	4	4

29. Current spiritual health	Very good	Good but could experience God more fully
30. Spiritual practices	Sabbath-keeping	Sabbath-keeping
31. Small group satisfaction	Yes, good to have trustworthy people to share with	Expands my outlook
32. Number of sessions attended	—	3
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Listening to others and being listened to
34. Least helpful	—	Original presentation

Table 4. Participant C Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	2 Close	2 Close
3. Spiritual depth	3 Moderately Satisfied	2 Satisfied
4. Family relationships	3 Moderately Satisfied	2 Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	4 Not Satisfied	2 Satisfied
6. General health	Good	Good
7. Financial health	3 Moderately Satisfied	4 Not Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	4 Not Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer Lectio Divina tithing acts of service	personal prayer corporate prayer Lectio Divina journaling Sabbath-keeping tithing small group
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Weekly	Weekly
11. Sabbath-keeping	Twice a month	Once per week

12. Time with loved ones	Three times	Four times
13. Time with colleagues	None	Two times
14. Time in exercise	Twice in the month	Twice in month
15. Balanced diet	Three or more times a week	Three or more times a week
16. Quantity of sleep	Three or more times a week	Three or more times a week
17. Time in recreation	Twice in month	One or two times per week
18. Financial activities	None	Twice per month
19. Rate intimacy with God	69%	81%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	94%	98%
21. Rate spiritual growth	60%	98%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	49%	77%
23. Rate prayer life	48%	83%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	39%	56%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	43%	74%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	8%	96%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	26%	50%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	45%	31%
29. Current spiritual health	Poor	Renewal and re-centering
30. Spiritual practices	journaling prayer Bible reading	prayer and journaling
31. Small group satisfaction	None at this time	Love small group; sharing and accountability
32. Number of sessions attended	—	4
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Prayer and encouragement offered to one another

34. Least helpful	—	None
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Table 5. Participant D Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	1 Very Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	1 Very Close	1 Very close
3. Spiritual depth	1 Very Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
4. Family relationships	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	2 Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
6. General health	Very good	Very good
7. Financial health	3 Moderately Satisfied	2 Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study small group acts of service	personal prayer corporate prayer fasting Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study small group acts of service other
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Daily	Daily
11. Sabbath-keeping	Once a month	Three times per month
12. Time with loved ones	Other	More than four times
13. Time with colleagues	Two times	Two times
14. Time in exercise	One to two times a week	One to two times a week
15. Balanced diet	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
16. Quantity of sleep	One to two times a week	One to two times a week

17. Time in recreation	Twice in month	Once a week
18. Financial activities	None	98%
19. Rate intimacy with God	100%	100%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	100%	100%
21. Rate spiritual growth	92%	100%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	100%	98%
23. Rate prayer life	96%	99%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	92%	93%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	75%	90%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	100%	95%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	90%	95%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	90%	95%
29. Current spiritual health	Healthy but overweight	Very positive, much time in prayer, searching scriptures, engagement with others
30. Spiritual practices	prayer Bible reading	Prayer searching scriptures small groups fasting
31. Small group satisfaction	Very important and effective	Greatest growth in small groups
32. Number of sessions attended	—	One (was actually two)
33. Most meaningful project Experience	—	Mutual support through prayer
34. Least helpful	—	None

Table 6. Participant E Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	2 Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied

2. Intimacy with God	2 Close	3 Average
3. Spiritual depth	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
4. Family relationships	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	2 Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
6. General health	Very good	Very good
7. Financial health	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	1 Very Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study acts of service	personal prayer journaling small group
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Daily	Daily
11. Sabbath-keeping	Three time per month	Once per week
12. Time with loved ones	More than four times	More than four times
13. Time with colleagues	Four times	Three times
14. Time in exercise	Three or more times per week	One to two times per week
15. Balanced diet	Daily	Three or more times per week
16. Quantity of sleep	Daily	Daily
17. Time in recreation	Three or more times per week	One or two times per week
18. Financial activities	Twice a month	None
19. Rate intimacy with God	71%	80%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	99%	100%
21. Rate spiritual growth	94%	95%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	94%	60%

23. Rate prayer life	74%	67%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	85%	95%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	77%	70%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	50%	100%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	65%	56%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	68%	69%
29. Current spiritual health	Improving daily, spiritual practices increase desire to do more	Reasonably good
30. Spiritual practices	centering prayer scripture reading reading commentaries	meditation prayer spiritual partner
31. Small group satisfaction	Appreciates congregation helping to keep her accountable	Need the feedback and support
32. Number of sessions attended	—	5
33. Most meaningful project Experience	—	Forming bond of trust with other clergy
34. Least helpful	—	None

Table 7. Participant F Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	2 Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	1 Very close	2 Close
3. Spiritual depth	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
4. Family relationships	2 Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
6. General health	Very good	Excellent
7. Financial health	1 Very Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied

8. Rate ministry satisfaction	1 Very Satisfied	2 Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer journaling Sabbath-keeping tithing acts of service other	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping tithing acts of service Bible study
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Daily	Daily
11. Sabbath-keeping	Once per week	Once per week
12. Time with loved ones	More than four times	More than four times
13. Time with colleagues	Two times	More than four times
14. Time in exercise	None	Three or more times per week
15. Balanced diet	Three or more times per week	Daily
16. Quantity of sleep	Daily	Daily
17. Time in recreation	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
18. Financial activities	Twice a month	Twice a month
19. Rate intimacy with God	91%	93%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	99%	100%
21. Rate spiritual growth	97%	95%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	81%	100%
23. Rate prayer life	100%	92%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	82%	97%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	96%	91%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	94%	98%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	95%	94%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	90%	95%

29. Current spiritual health	Good	Very good
30. Spiritual practices	Prayer and meditation	Prayer and meditation
31. Small group satisfaction	Being held accountable and knowing God called me	Encouragement from others helps
32. Number of sessions attended	—	5
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Learning and sharing with others
34. Least helpful	—	Not sure

Table 8. Participant G Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	3 Moderately Satisfied	2 Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	2 Close	2 Close
3. Spiritual depth	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
4. Family relationships	1 Very Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	2 Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
6. General health	Excellent	Good
7. Financial health	1 Very Satisfied	2 Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	3 Moderately Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer fasting Sabbath-keeping tithing acts of service	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping tithing acts of service Bible study small groups
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Daily	Daily
11. Sabbath-keeping	Twice a month	Once per week

12. Time with loved ones	More than four times	Four times
13. Time with colleagues	None	Two times
14. Time in exercise	Twice a month	Twice a month
15. Balanced diet	Daily	Three or more times per week
16. Quantity of sleep	Daily	Daily
17. Time in recreation	Three or more times per week	One or two times per week
18. Financial activities	Daily	One a week
19. Rate intimacy with God	72%	92%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	100%	100%
21. Rate spiritual growth	50%	92%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	29%	21%
23. Rate prayer life	71%	100%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	88%	60%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	100%	73%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	100%	30%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	54%	100%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	55%	92%
29. Current spiritual health	Moderately healthy	Good but could be more focused
30. Spiritual practices	Biblical teaching	Praying and talking with other clergy
31. Small group satisfaction	To a limited extent	No, not in any group
32. Number of sessions attended	—	4
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	The book and I am not alone
34. Least helpful	—	Nothing

Table 9. Participant H Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	3 Average	3 Average
3. Spiritual depth	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
4. Family relationships	2 Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	3 Moderately Satisfied	2 Satisfied
6. General health	Very good	Very good
7. Financial health	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study acts of service	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study acts of service small groups
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Weekly	Daily
11. Sabbath-keeping	Once per week	Once per week
12. Time with loved ones	More than four times	More than four times
13. Time with colleagues	None	Two times
14. Time in exercise	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
15. Balanced diet	Daily	Daily
16. Quantity of sleep	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
17. Time in recreation	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
18. Financial Activities	Twice a month	Once a week
19. Rate intimacy with God	52%	51%

20. Rate Assurance of God's love	93%	97%
21. Rate spiritual growth	50%	82%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	51%	44%
23. Rate prayer life	44%	47%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	70%	81%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	70%	56%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	25%	24%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	53%	77%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	80%	80%
29. Current spiritual health	Moderately healthy	Healthy, seeking better discipline
30. Spiritual practices	Prayer, study, reading	Bible and topic study
31. Small group satisfaction	Church study groups	More as facilitator rather than participant
32. Number of sessions attended	—	4
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Recognition of the importance of intentionality
34. Least helpful	—	Not sure

Table 10. Participant I Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	3 Average	2 Close
3. Spiritual depth	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
4. Family relationships	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	2 Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
6. General health	Very good	Good

7. Financial health	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	2 Satisfied	1 Very Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer journaling Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study small groups acts of service other	personal prayer corporate prayer journaling Sabbath-keeping tithing Bible study small groups acts of service other fasting
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Daily	Daily
11. Sabbath-keeping	Three times per month	Once per week
12. Time with loved ones	More than four times	More than four times
13. Time with colleagues	Two times	Three times
14. Time in exercise	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week
15. Balanced diet	Three or more times per week	Three or more time per week
16. Quantity of sleep	Three or more times per week	One or two times per week
17. Time in recreation	One or two times per week	Three or more times per week
18. Financial activities	Once a week	Once a week
19. Rate intimacy with God	67%	74%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	75%	98%
21. Rate spiritual growth	63%	80%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	54%	71%
23. Rate prayer life	56%	72%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	69%	73%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	79%	66%

26. Rate spiritual friendships	68%	85%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	81%	80%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	85%	80%
29. Current spiritual health	Fair	Improving and grounded
30. Spiritual practices	Sacraments and daily prayer	Prayer and theological reading
31. Small group satisfaction	Accountability helps	Accountability and encouragement
32. Number of sessions attended	—	2
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Reading and reflecting on Rule and its impact
34. Least helpful	—	Can't answer – had to withdraw early for personal reasons

Table 11. Participant J Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	4 Not Satisfied	2 Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	3 Average	3 Average
3. Spiritual depth	3 Moderately Satisfied	4 Not Satisfied
4. Family relationships	2 Satisfied	2 Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	4 Not Satisfied	2 Satisfied
6. General health	Good	Good
7. Financial health	3 Moderately Satisfied	4 Not Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	2 Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer tithing Bible study acts of service	personal prayer corporate prayer Lectio Divina tithing small group

		acts of service other
10. Engagement in spiritual practices	Two or more times per month	Weekly
11. Sabbath-keeping	Twice a month	Twice a month
12. Time with loved ones	Three times	Twice a month
13. Time with colleagues	Three times	Two times
14. Time in exercise	One to two times per week	One to two times per week
15. Balanced diet	Three or more times per week	One to two times per week
16. Quantity of sleep	Twice in month	One to two times per week
17. Time in recreation	Twice in month	Twice in month
18. Financial activities	Twice in month	One in month
19. Rate intimacy with God	40%	68%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	35%	66%
21. Rate spiritual growth	60%	88%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	24%	41%
23. Rate prayer life	45%	35%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	65%	71%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	65%	34%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	65%	96%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	71%	50%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	72%	84%
29. Current spiritual health	Tired	Needing refreshment
30. Spiritual practices	Meditative prayer, lectio, serving poor, journaling	Journaling, centering prayer, Lectio Divina
31. Small group satisfaction	Yes encouragement	Accountability

32. Number of sessions attended	—	4
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Group increased my compassion and connection
34. Least helpful	—	Book

Table 12. Participant K Survey Results

Questions	Pre-Survey	Post Survey
1. Current spiritual state	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
2. Intimacy with God	2 Close	3 Average
3. Spiritual depth	2 Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
4. Family relationships	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
5. Colleague relationships	3 Moderately Satisfied	2 Satisfied
6. General health	Good	Very good
7. Financial health	4 Not Satisfied	4 Not Satisfied
8. Rate ministry satisfaction	3 Moderately Satisfied	3 Moderately Satisfied
9. Spiritual practices	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping small group acts of service	personal prayer corporate prayer Sabbath-keeping small group
10. Engagement in Spiritual practices	Daily	Weekly
11. Sabbath-keeping	Three times per month	Three times per month
12. Time with loved ones	More than four times	Four times
13. Time with colleagues	Two times	Three times
14. Time in exercise	One to two times per week	One to two times per week
15. Balanced diet	Three or more times per week	Three or more times per week

16. Quantity of sleep	Daily	Daily
17. Time in recreation	One or two times per week	Twice a month
18. Financial activities	Once a month	Once in month
19. Rate intimacy with God	61%	66%
20. Rate assurance of God's love	98%	90%
21. Rate spiritual growth	81%	58%
22. Rate Biblical guidance	51%	43%
23. Rate prayer life	51%	48%
24. Rate relationships with loved ones	45%	55%
25. Rate balanced lifestyle	43%	56%
26. Rate spiritual friendships	71%	71%
27. Rate satisfaction in ministry	81%	64%
28. Rate ministry effectiveness	82%	75%
29. Current spiritual health	Mediocre	Going on to perfection
30. Spiritual practices	Conversations with colleagues and nature	Meditation
31. Small group satisfaction	Small group keeps me grounded	Keeps me balanced
32. Number of sessions attended	—	3
33. Most meaningful project experience	—	Colleague support
34. Least helpful	—	The book

Table 13. Life and Ministry Improvements

Participant	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Life Improvement (# of areas)	16	3	17	10	6	10	7	8	11	8	6
Ministry Improvement	None	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	Yes	None

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VITA

Jacquelyn Lee Brannen was born on January 18, 1957 in Biddeford, Maine. Reverend Brannen began her career as a teacher and counselor within the public-school system in the state of New Hampshire. She received a BA from Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire, a Master's in Education from Northeastern University in the field of Special Education and a Master's of Education in the field of Counseling from the University of New Hampshire. She then pursued a Master's in Divinity from Andover Newton Theological Seminary and anticipates receiving a Doctor of Ministry from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in May of 2019. Jacquelyn has been a United Methodist pastor since 2005. She is currently a District Superintendent for the Northern Maine District of the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church. She has three daughters and six beloved grandchildren. Her family has always been her most important calling.